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6 OF THE BEST

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real fans to the biggest moments
in the game” Adidas Uk

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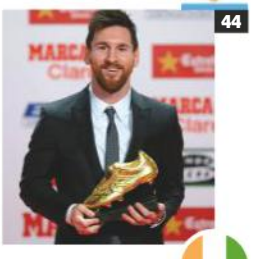

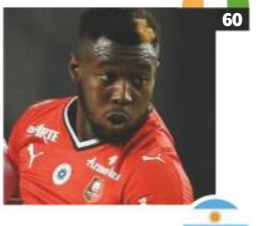

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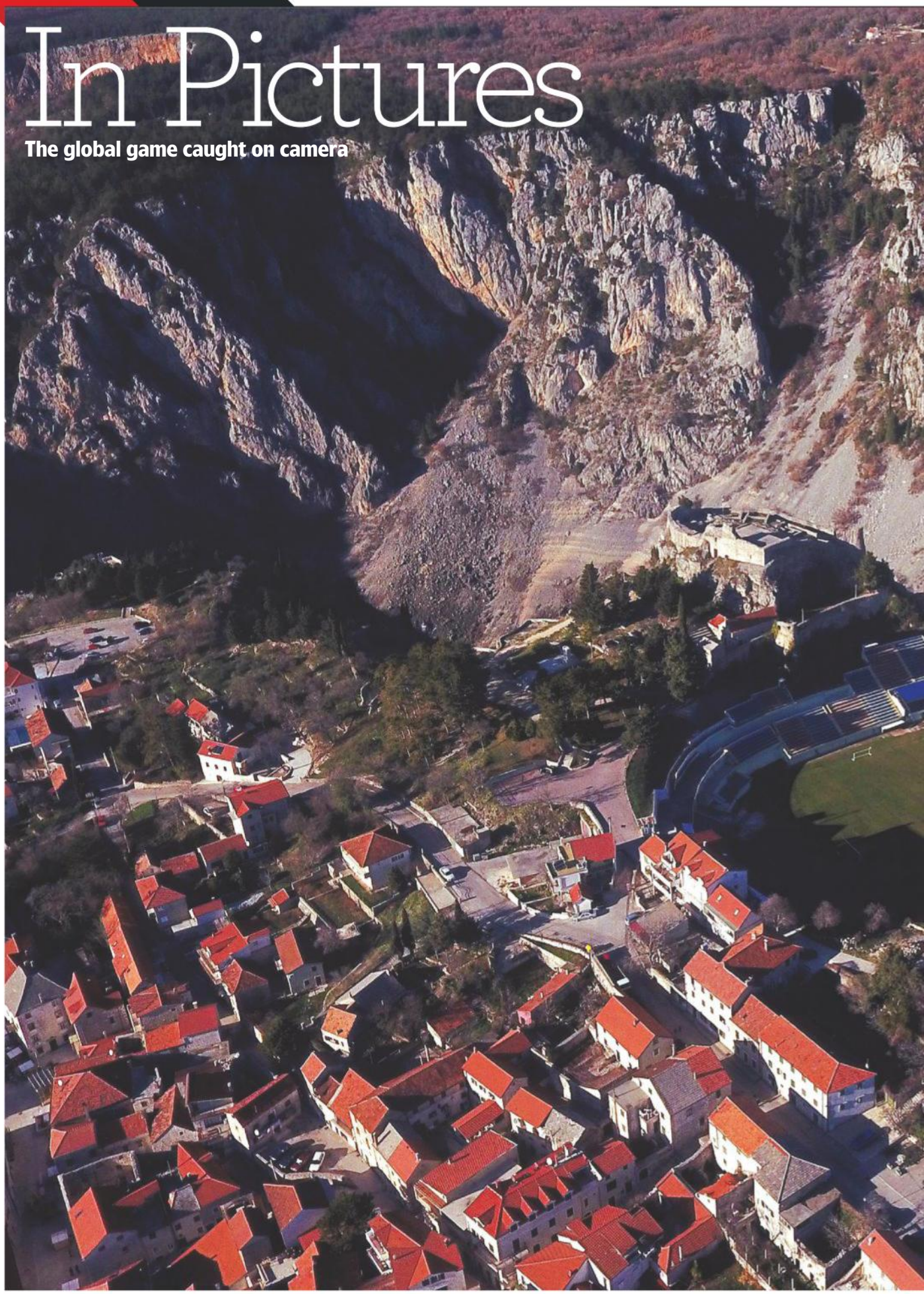

CROATIA...the Stadion Gospin Dolac, used by NK Imotski, is seen from a mountain view above the town of Imotski in the Dalmatia region

GERMANY...Wolfsburg's Josip Brekalo holds off Jeremy Toljan of Borussia Dortmund

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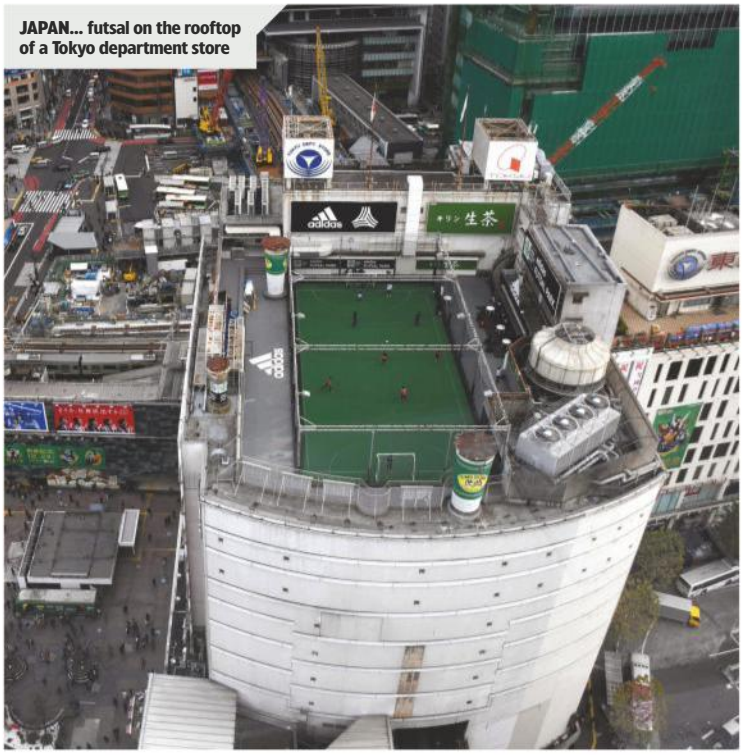

JAPAN... futsal on the rooftop of a Tokyo department store

AUSTRALIA...Newcastle Jets players defend a free-kick as three Central Coast Mariners players duck out of the way

BRAZIL...a Brazilian Barcelona fan cheers the first goal of *El Clasico* against Real Madrid while watching on television at a bar in Rio de Janeiro

ITALY...Internazionale's Joao Cancelo grabs Lazio defender Stefan Radu around the neck

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FROM THE EDITOR

A new year, and thoughts are turning to this summer's World Cup in Russia. But it is still hard to ignore the ongoing problems with the 2022 finals in Qatar.

This year the FIFAgate trial in New York is likely to provide further evidence of corruption in World Cup bidding processes dating back to Germany 2006 (and maybe even before then).

FIFA has not been put off by the allegations of corruption around the Qatar bid, while the problem of Qatar's climate has been solved by the drastic move to a winter World Cup in 2022.

As James Montague reports from his latest visit (page 30), the recent experience of the Gulf Cup – and the opposition to Qatar's hosting of the 2017 tournament – suggest the biggest obstacles facing the Qataris will be political.

Politics and football are intertwined; the recent comments about African countries by Donald Trump could return to scupper USA's bid to host the 2026 World Cup – especially as African votes will be crucial – and may benefit the rival bid from Morocco. It's a story to which we will be returning next month. See you then.

> Comments about African countries by Donald Trump could return to scupper USA's bid to host the 2026 World Cup

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

1 Mohamed Salah voted African Player of the Year ..... page 54
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3 Coutinho becomes second-most expensive player of all time ..... page 18
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8 Ajax sack coach Marcel Keizer ..... page 76
9 Ronaldinho confirms retirement ..... page 19
10 Rueda leaves Flamengo for Chile ..... page 19

Money...Mohamed Bin Hammam

FRANCE

Ref suspended for kicking a player

French referee Tony Chapron was banned "until further notice" after he deliberately tripped up and then sent off a Nantes player who had accidentally run into him during a Ligue 1 game.

The 45-year-old official kicked out at Brazilian defender Diego Carlos following a collision in the game against Paris Saint-Germain and then gave the defender his second yellow card of the match.

"Mr Tony Chapron, after reviewing the images, stated that his fall was caused accidentally," read a statement from the French federation, who rescinded Carlos' second booking.

A controversial figure for a number of years due to the high number of red cards he has issued, Chapron later said: "In the match, I was hit by Diego Carlos. On the occasion of this shock, I felt a sharp pain on a recent injury. In a bad reflex, I stretched my leg towards the player.

"I want to apologise to Diego Carlos."

"I was on vacation for seven months"

Carlos Tevez reflects on his highly paid spell in China with Shanghai Shenhua, which ended in January when he returned to Boca Juniors

QATAR

Bin Hammam confirms €6.7m payment from Germans

Mohamed Bin Hammam, the disgraced former FIFA vice-president, has confirmed receiving €6.7million in a payment which has been linked to the awarding of the 2006 World Cup to Germany, according to German broadcaster ZDF.

But the Qatari has denied involvement in any bribery, according to an interview on the station's *Sportreportage* programme.

Bin Hammam said: "The €6.7m have gone into my account, yes. But I would like to know why Germany should have bribed me for something they have already received.

"The sum was received after the [2000] World Cup award on my account."

Asked if he knew why he received a payment from Germany, he replied: "I do not know. No, of course I know, but excuse me – it's only you who cares, no one else."

In 2011, Bin Hammam was suspended by FIFA and then banned from football for life following allegations he had bribed 25 Caribbean Football Union members with a total of $1m, distributed by fellow FIFA ExCo member Jack Warner.

Crazy...ref Tony Chapron sends off Diego Carlos

HEROES & VILLAINS

LUAN

The Gremio forward was voted South American Footballer of the Year in the annual poll organised by Uruguayan newspaper *El Pais*.

Choice...Luan

JITENDRA SINGH

The Indian Arrows defender became, at 16 years and six months, the youngest-ever goalscorer in the I-League when on target against Shillong Lajong.

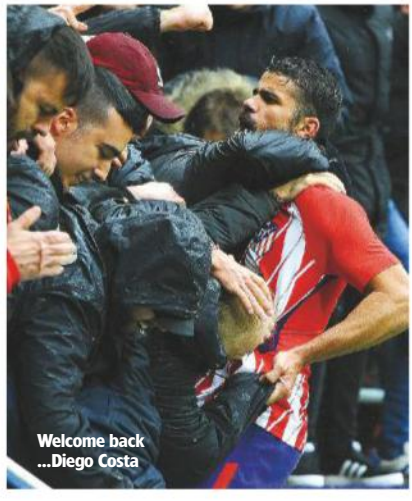
MAREK HAMSIK

He became Napoli's record scorer with his 116th goal for the club, in a 3-2 win over Sampdoria, to surpass Diego Maradona.

REAL BETIS

Scored five goals in the league against their rivals Sevilla for the first time in their history – and they did it away at the Sanchez Pizjuan stadium in a 5-3 win.

Noisey neighbours...Real Betis celebrate beating Sevilla



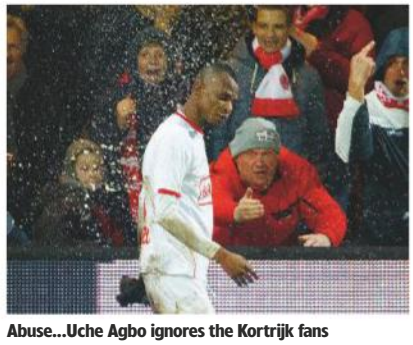
Welcome back ...Diego Costa

DIEGO COSTA

On his first start since his return to Atletico Madrid and on a yellow card, the ex-Chelsea striker scored a goal in the 68th minute and then celebrated in the crowd. He was promptly shown a second yellow and sent off.

MATTHEW TIPTON

The manager of Warrenpoint Town brought himself on in the closing stages of an Irish Cup fifth-round tie against Cliftonville and got sent off for two yellow cards in the space of three minutes. His team then had to play extra time with 10 men and lost 4-3.



Abuse...Uche Agbo ignores the Kortrijk fans

BELGIAN FA

Kortrijk were fined just €1,000 for the monkey chants aimed by their supporters at Standard Liege's Uche Agbo.

JOSEPH LAMPTEY

FIFA backed the lifetime ban of the disgraced Ghanaian referee, whose controversial calls marred a World Cup 2018 qualifier between South Africa and Senegal.

"Organising games at times when it's difficult for fans to attend is to show a monstrous indifference to the social importance of football"

Borussia Dortmund supporters promise to boycott the new concept of Bundesliga football on a Monday night

GOALS we'd like to see again

1 EDINSON CAVANI
Paris Saint-Germain v Caen
An impressive run and cross by Kylian Mbappe is finished with a back-heel from the corner of the six-yard area.

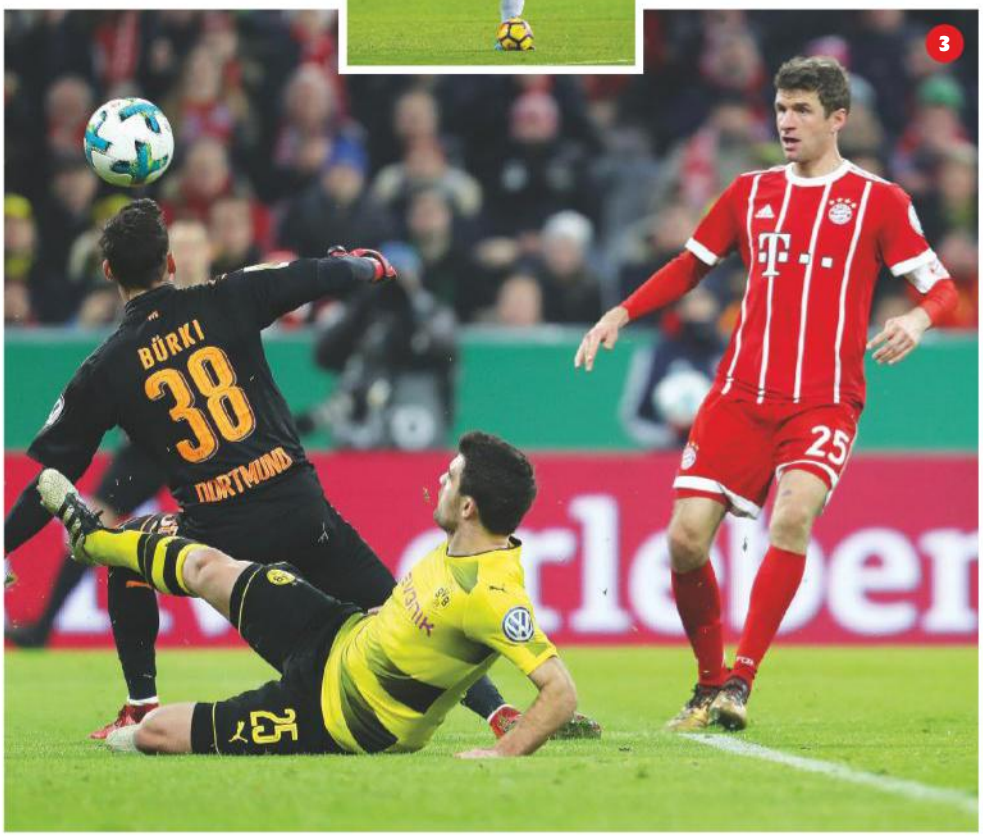
2 PEDRO OBIANG
West Ham United v Tottenham Hotspur
A 30-yard strike that flies into the top corner of the net.

3 THOMAS MULLER
Bayern Munich v Borussia Dortmund
Exchanges passes with Robert Lewandowski before chipping the Dortmund goalkeeper.

4 LUIS SUAREZ
Barcelona v Real Sociedad
Takes on a first-time, right-footed shot and curls high into the far corner from just inside the penalty area.

5 CHRISTIAN ERIKSEN
Tottenham Hotspur v Everton
A slick passing move as Son Heung-min clips a ball to Dele Alli, who flicks a pass with his heel for Eriksen to beat Jordan Pickford.

6 DANIEL WASS
Celta Vigo v Real Madrid
A quick counter-attack and a slide-rule pass by Iago Aspas is finished with a delightful chip over Keylor Navas from the edge of the penalty area.



WINNERS

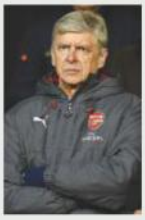
PAOLO GUERRERO
Last month a loser after being banned from the World Cup, he has since had a reprieve and can now play in Russia.

CEREZO OSAKA
Winners 43 years ago and beaten in six Finals since, the Japanese side finally lifted the Emperor's Cup once again.

KEVIN O'CONNOR
The Preston North End defender won €1m on the Irish national lottery while visiting family in County Wexford.

SINISA MIHAJLOVIC
Sent off for his protest at a VAR goal decision and sacked by Torino the next day.

HUSSEIN AMOTTA
Won the 2017 CAF Champions League but sacked as Wydad coach after a poor start to the Moroccan season.



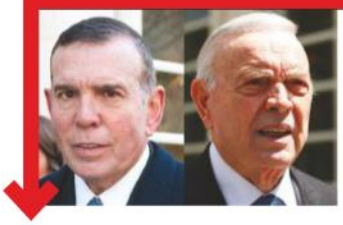
ARSENE WENGER
Lost in the FA Cup third round for the first time as Nottingham Forest beat holders Arsenal.

LOSERS

"Anyone who gets home before five in the morning gets fined"

Real Betis winger Joaquin after his side's 5-3 win away to city rivals Sevilla

HEADLINERS: Juan Angel Napout & Jose Maria Marin



First guilty verdicts in FIFAGate scandal

New York trial could produce many more convictions

The guilty verdicts and impending jail terms for South American football supremos Jose Maria Marin and Juan Angel Napout in December's FIFAGate trial in New York were just the start of what promises to be a year-long drip-feed of disgrace.

Some 42 individuals and three companies were indicted in 2015 by the US Justice Department on charges connected with a $200million corruption conspiracy among senior football figures in the Americas.

So far, 24 have admitted guilt in plea-bargain deals involving the restitution of millions of dollars and, in some cases, entry for themselves and their families into the US witness-protection programme.

> The guilty verdicts in December's FIFAGate trial in New York were just the start of what promises to be a year-long drip-feed of disgrace

Marin, a former president of the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF), and Napout, ex-head of continental confederation CONMEBOL, were detained in custody after being found guilty following a five-week trial and a jury's four days of deliberation.

The jury could not reach a unanimous verdict on ex-Peru federation president Manuel Burga. The case against him was deemed "not proven" though he faces further charges back home in Lima.

All three men had denied bribery charges relating to multi-million media rights for Copa America and Libertadores Cup games, as well as the Brazilian Cup.

Earlier last autumn, jail terms of eight and 15 months respectively were handed out to Guatemala's Hector Trujillo and to Costas Takkas, who was once aide to ex-CONCACAF head and former FIFA vice-president Jeffrey Webb. The latter, currently under house arrest at his luxury home in the US state of Georgia, is due to be sentenced on March 7.

Webb is not the only one under threat of prison: 19 men, one woman and at least one company are due to come up for sentence over the next nine months.

Each sentencing exercise will unload a further vault-load of damning evidence about the multi-million rip-off of the game by individuals operating at its highest levels, and treating lucrative television and marketing contracts as their personal piggy banks.

Crucial evidence in the federal court in Brooklyn came from Alejandro Burzaco, who said that he had paid bribes to all three defendants to secure international match rights. He also claimed Fox Sports, Mexico's Televisa and Brazil's Globo paid bribes for TV rights, although the companies have all issued denials.

Burzaco then stated that an unidentified Qatari source had bribed South American members of the FIFA executive committee to vote in favour of the Gulf state's 2022 World Cup bid.

Identified as a central "capo" of the South American bribery business was Julio Grondona, the Argentinian AFA president from 1979 until his death, while still in office, in 2014. Grondona was also finance chair and senior vice-president of FIFA. Those named in evidence for assisting in his profiteering included former CBF boss Ricardo Teixeira and its current president, Marco Polo del Nero.

Guilty...Marin (right) and Napout

Justice...US court

Teixeira and Del Nero have both been indicted but cannot be extradited from Brazil because of a protectionist clause in the constitution. Former CONCACAF and CONMEBOL presidents Jack Warner and Nicolas Leoz continue contesting extradition applications in Trinidad & Tobago and Paraguay respectively.

Police investigations into FIFA's past financial affairs are being conducted not only in Switzerland but also in France, Brazil and Austria.

The world federation, while awaiting further negative headlines from New York, has lodged multi-million dollar claims for restitution against all the indicted individuals.

Keir Radnedge

"I've always played with my heart and I hope to carry on progressing as a footballer"

Japanese golden oldie, 51-year-old Kazu Miura, on signing a contract extension at Yokohama

Leon BAILEY (Bayer Leverkusen)

The speedy Jamaican wide man has arguably been the player of the season so far in the Bundesliga, topping *Kicker* magazine's player ratings and weighing in with six goals and four assists in the autumn campaign.

In the 12 months since he moved to Leverkusen from Belgian side Genk, the 20-year-old has impressed with his speed, skill and versatility, alternating between wing-back and winger.

He was the outstanding performer in a 3-1 loss to Bayern Munich in the first game back after the winter break, in which he almost scored a sensational equaliser, hitting the crossbar after a devastating run into the area.

Inevitably, there is much talk of a big-money move in the near future, but Leverkusen are adamant that they will hold on to their asset.

As the January transfer window opened, director Jonas Boldt said: "Well now the time starts again when there is an insane amount of talk. We have absolutely no thought of selling Leon Bailey. He has a contract until 2022 – and we are in the driver's seat."

PAULINHO (Barcelona)
The Brazilian's goal in Barcelona's 4-2 victory away to Real Sociedad took him to eight for the season – double that of Cristiano Ronaldo.

DONNY VAN DE BEEK (Ajax)
Despite his side's poor start to the season, the 20-year-old midfielder has emerged as a key figure this term, scoring eight goals and extending his Ajax contract and committing himself to the Amsterdam club until 2022.

PHILIPP MAX (Augsburg)
The young left-back has been the leading assist provider in Europe's top leagues this campaign, raising the possibility that he will be on the move this summer.

EZEQUIEL BARCO (Atlanta United)
The 18-year-old left Independiente in a $15m deal, making him the most expensive transfer in Major League Soccer history.

JONATHAN GONZALEZ (Monterrey)
The teenager declared his allegiance to Mexico after playing for USA youth sides from the age of 14. The midfielder is eligible because his parents are from Mexico and he has dual citizenship.

JADON SANCHO (Borussia Dortmund)
A member of England's Under-17 World Cup-winning squad, he made his full Bundesliga debut in January.

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

Mourinho struggles in Guardiola's shadow

Jose Mourinho claimed he was "the happy one" on arriving at Manchester United in the summer of 2016; a manager at ease with himself and the job he had always craved.

But the mood is very different now. Mourinho often appears tetchy and distracted, quick to throw verbal grenades at critics such as United legend Paul Scholes and to stoke up a needless feud with Chelsea counterpart Antonio Conte.

Why? It's very simple. Mourinho is being spectacularly upstaged by the scintillating style and success of the Manchester City team fashioned by Pep Guardiola.

The man with the aura in English football is Guardiola. The man fretting in the shadows is Mourinho. And he loathes it.

Surely, the moment that symbolised it was his claim that the £300million he spent in the transfer market was not enough to compete with City. It was a risible suggestion, widely mocked, and less than appreciated among the power-brokers of Old Trafford.

Yes, United spent less than City, but not by a significant amount. The real difference was in how the riches were used.

Mourinho broke the world transfer record for Paul Pogba and spent £75m on Romelu Lukaku. Guardiola's key purchases were young, unproven talents such as Gabriel Jesus, Leroy Sane and John Stones. They were risks.

It was a matter of philosophy: pragmatism against idealism.

The moment that symbolised this crucial difference was United's dull 0-0 draw away to Liverpool earlier in the season. There was no hint in their dour approach of the risk that infuses the football of Manchester City and which thrills spectators.

"One thing is entertainment for fans, another thing is an entertaining game for people who read football in a different way," said Mourinho after the Liverpool game. "For me, the second half was a game of chess, but my opponent didn't open the door for me to win the game."

Feeling blue...Pep's the main man

Rivals... Mourinho (right) and Guardiola

It was classic Mourinho. The alibi for not winning was the tactics of the opposition rather than his team's own sterile play.

His reactive mentality has been hugely successful in his career and when it works he can revel in the plaudits. But now it's causing him trouble because Manchester United languish behind City in the Premier League table – and are equally far behind in appreciation of the quality of their football.

> The man with the aura in English football is Guardiola. The man fretting in the shadows is Mourinho. And he loathes it

When Mourinho was approached by United to become their manager he told them he was the best man to do battle with Guardiola, who had just joined City. The pair had a bitter duel when they were at Real Madrid and Barcelona respectively, and Mourinho won the Spanish title in his second season.

This is the second season of their rivalry in Manchester and so far it is no contest. The response is another classic Mourinho tactic: find enemies to attack and divert the focus.

Scholes was a foolish target. He is one of United's most cherished modern heroes and a man known for his honesty and integrity. If he makes comments as a TV pundit you can be sure they are authentic and serious opinion, as was his criticism in one match of Pogba.

Mourinho's response was to tell the world how many trophies he had captured as a manager and that Scholes would have a very good career as a manager if he won just a quarter of that number. It was a puerile outburst, revealing the insecurity of its author.

Guardiola once said Mourinho was "the chief of the press room" but after his verbal assault on Conte – who is a street fighter in this territory – the Chelsea boss hit back, wondering if the United manager was suffering from "*senile demenzia*".

Is this yet another arena where Jose Mourinho is now struggling, where his mighty aura is fading? WS

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Desperate Infantino banking on Russia

This is a crucial year for Gianni Infantino's transitional reign at FIFA. It sees the first World Cup of the scandal-hit post-Blatter era, sees the answer to significant questions about the financial damage of years of corruption, and will define the tone around a reshaping of the game's most prestigious event.

Blatter's tenure, as general secretary then president, lasted 34 years and collapsed amid the chaos of the 2018 and 2022 World Cup awards, and revelations about greed and conspiracy at the heart of the international game.

Infantino, formerly UEFA general secretary, came to power two years ago and, as he was not a member of the confederation presidencies' cabal, was therefore comparatively untarnished by a political back story. But his presidency so far has been vastly disappointing.

In governance terms, Infantino turned back the reform clock by removing the independence of the judicial committees, sacking the chairs and appointing ineffective replacements. In financial terms, he has overseen two years of annual losses, but assured the world game that the profits being generated by the imminent Russian World Cup will bring the books back into balance and permit him to distribute the extended development largesse which helped garner votes.

Cheers...Infantino (left) and Russian president Vladimir Putin at the draw

> The likelihood of no action by FIFA's inquiry into Russian football doping before the World Cup means that the cloud of suspicion will continue to hover above the landscape

But the jury is out on whether he has done enough to turn around the poisoned FIFA image, at least to the extent of encouraging a renewed influx of sponsors.

FIFA in general and Infantino in particular need the Russian World Cup to be a rollicking success and that remains a questionable issue all of its own.

Some western media outlets have adopted a virulent anti-Russian agenda which they will presumably follow through aggressively right to the final whistle of the Final on July 15.

If last year's Confederations Cup is a decent guide then the main event will be efficient in terms of its on-the-ground operation. But the Russians undermined their own cause with the doping farrago, which handed critics an easy stick with which to keep on beating them.

Russia's equivocations and denials over the length, depth and breadth of the deception have only dragged out the process, cast doubts on half a dozen of the national football squad and handed critics an open goal in which to aim.

Over Christmas, Vitaly Mutko, long-serving sports and football supremo, stood down as chairman of the World Cup's local organising committee in an attempt to remove one of the lightning conductors for World Cup scepticism.

However, the likelihood of no action by FIFA's own inquiry into Russian football doping before the World Cup means that the cloud of suspicion will continue to hover above the landscape.

FIFA and the organisers have issued positive figures about tickets, but of more direct note should be murmurs of concern in the travel industry about a lack of enthusiasm for flight and hotel bookings.

Infantino continues to look forward with haughty happiness as he keeps his promise of expanding the World Cup to 48 teams, and Congress will almost certainly award the 2026 finals to the USA, Canada and Mexico.

He will most likely still be president then – if Russia turns a profit – but, unlike in the past, that is no longer a given. And that is what makes the next six months so intriguing for FIFA. WS

No more winging it

Jose Maria Marin was always a right winger – off the pitch, as governor of Sao Paulo between 1982 and 1983, but also on it.

According to the Brazilian football confederation, he played on the right wing for Sao Paulo in the early 1950s, making his debut in the state championship as a sub for Friaca – who had scored Brazil's goal in their 1950 World Cup defeat.

Marin, apparently, played more than 30 games for Sao Paulo – and also for Jabaquara of Santos, Juventus of Sao Paulo – before enrolling in law school.

So this was his foot on the first rung of the career ladder which brought him to commerce, politics and football administration – and then back to face the long arm of the law in a United States federal court.

Marin is going to prison for his role in the FIFAGate corruption scandal. A jury in New York rejected his lawyer's defence that Marin had been a mere victim of crooked dealings between CBF predecessor Ricardo Teixiera and successor Marco Polo del Nero.

The bribery revelations in court even woke up FIFA's slumbering ethics committee into suspending Del Nero pending investigation – although two years too late, of course. Del Nero has told CBF colleagues that he expects to be back in office soon enough.

Going to jail... Jose Maria Marin

But he will not, presumably, dare fly to Zurich for a personal hearing. In that case he might be assumed to be failing to co-operate with an ethics inquiry. And, "failing to co-operate" is a catch-all offence.

FIFA sent a normalisation committee into Argentina after the AFA chaos which followed the death of Julio Grondona. It should do the same with Brazil – while Marin sits in prison in the US, whiling away his days, thinking back to his good old days when football was about the ball, not the bribes.

Wembley not Wales

The Football Association of Wales (FAW) has every right to feel aggrieved with UEFA for turning down its offer of Cardiff to replace Brussels as a host city for the pan-European Euro 2020 finals.

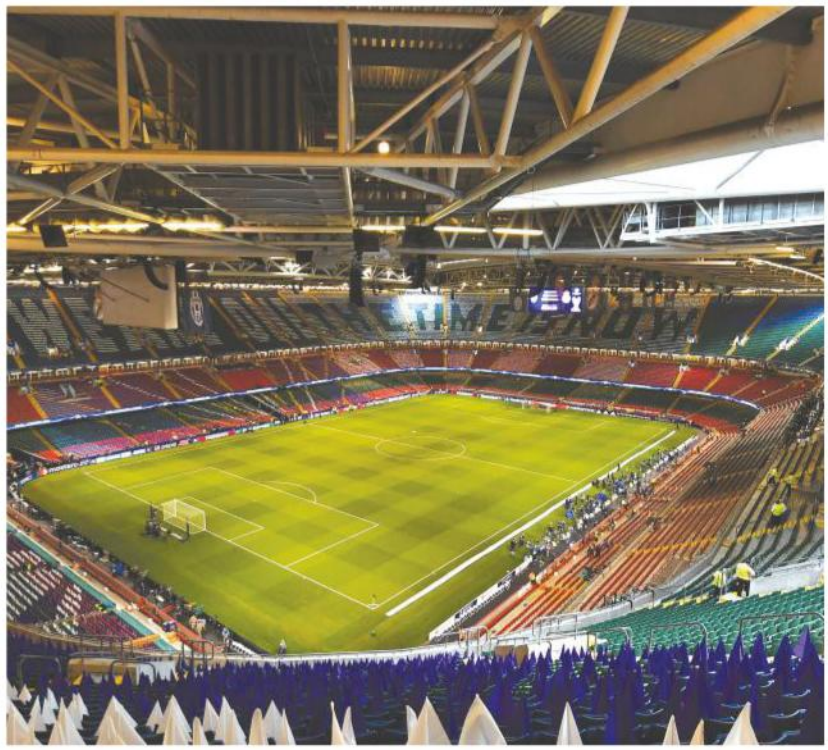
The Belgian authorities have been struggling for years with the poisoned legacy of Heysel following the death of 39 Juventus supporters in 1985.

Heysel was rebuilt for the co-hosted Euro 2000 but a host of proposals for a new Brussels venue have fallen by the wayside since. The failure to follow through in time for Euro 2020 was the last straw.

Cardiff, Stockholm and Wembley were the replacement options, and the FAW believed in its cause after the successful stagings of the UEFA Super Cup at Cardiff City in 2014 and the Champions League Final at the Principality (formerly Millennium) Stadium last year.

Going to Cardiff would also have maintained UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin's strategy of keeping Europe's middle and lower-ranking nations on board.

Instead, his executive committee decided on the "easy" option of handing Wembley the "homeless"' three group games and a second round tie. This means Wembley will stage seven games in all since it has already been allocated the two semi-finals and the Final.

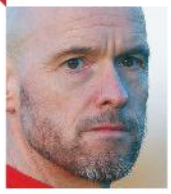


Ignored...Cardiff's Principality Stadium

FAW chief executive Jonathan Ford represents Wales on the International Board and in March they will decide on whether video refereeing will be used worldwide – and hence for the World Cup.

A poll of players undertaken by *Kicker* in Germany came up with a 47 per cent vote against VAR, with communication remaining a thorny issue for both players and fans.

But then, who has ever minded their opinions?



"The play of the team and the individual must improve on a daily basis. Good is not good enough"

New Ajax coach Erik Ten Hag sets the bar high

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

EUROPE

PHILIPPE COUTINHO's move from Liverpool to Barcelona for €160m was the second-most expensive transfer in history. For all the winter transfer-window deals in Europe's big five leagues, go to www.worldsoccer.com

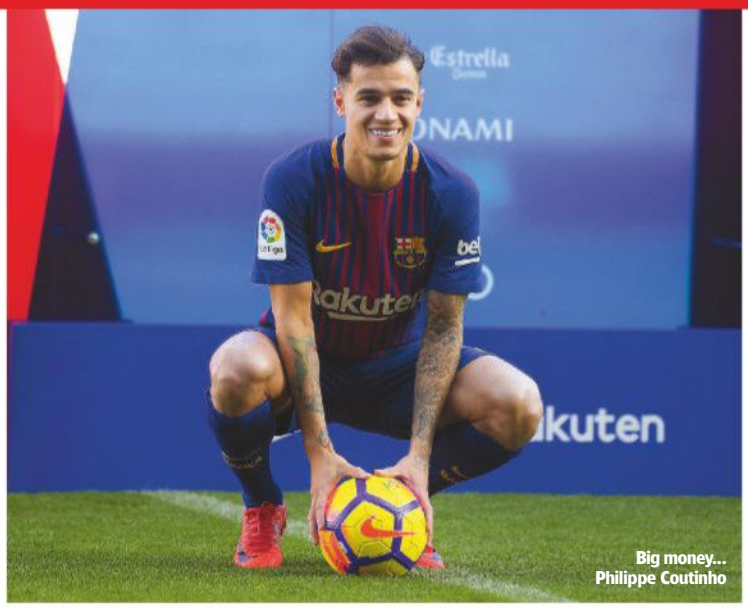
Switch...Jair Ventura

Former Manchester United winger **RYAN GIGGS** succeeded Chris Coleman as manager of Wales.

Swansea City sacked Paul Clement with the club bottom of the Premier League and appointed **CARLOS CARVALHAL**, who was replaced at Championship side Sheffield Wednesday by former Hertha Berlin boss **JOS LUHUKAY**. Stoke City appointed **PAUL LAMBERT** to replace Mark Hughes.

Ex-Watford boss **WALTER MAZZARRI** was named coach of Serie A side Torino after they sacked Sinisa Mihajlovic.

Former Milan coach **VINCENZO MONTELLA** replaced Eduardo Berizzo at Sevilla. Relegation-threatened La Liga side Las Palmas appointed **PACO JEMEZ** for a second time, while Malaga hired former Granada boss **JOSE GONZALEZ** after sacking Michel.



Big money... Philippe Coutinho

Saint-Etienne appointed **JEAN-LOUIS GASSET** to replace Oscar Garcia, who took charge of Greek Super League leaders Olympiakos.

Bosnia named Croatian **ROBERT PROSINECKI** – who left Azerbaijan in October – as national coach.

Galatasaray appointed **FATIH TERIM** as coach for a fourth time after sacking Igor Tudor with the club third in the Turkish Super Lig.

Ajax appointed Utrecht's **ERIK TEN HAG** to replace sacked coach Marcel Keizer. Sparta Rotterdam appointed veteran **DICK ADVOCAAT** as their new coach.

GRAEME MURTY, who had been caretaker at the Scottish Premiership club following October's sacking of Pedro Caixinha, was appointed permanent manager of Rangers.

SOUTH AMERICA

Santos named **JAIR VENTURA** as coach after he led Brazilian rivals Botafogo to the quarter-finals of last year's Libertadores Cup.

Argentinian striker **CARLOS TEVEZ** left Chinese club Shanghai Shenhua and joined Boca Juniors for a third time.

Former Manchester United and Real Madrid defender **GABRIEL HEINZE**, who resigned after guiding Argentinos Juniors to promotion last season, was appointed coach of Velez Sarsfield. Ex-Argentina striker **DIEGO MILITO** returned to Racing as general manager, while **EDUARDO COUDET** joined the club as coach from Mexican side Tijuana. **EZEQUIEL CARBONI** took charge of Libertadores runners-up Lanus, replacing **JORGE ALMIRON**, who was appointed coach of Colombia's Atletico Nacional.

At the age of 41, Uruguayan striker **SEBASTIAN ABREU** set a new world record by signing for Chilean side Audax Italiano – the 26th club of his professional career.

Brazilian **VINICIUS EUTROPIO** replaced Spain's Benat San Jose as coach of Bolivian champions Bolivar.

CONCACAF

JOHN HERDMAN left his role as coach of Canada's women's team to succeed Octavio Zambrano in charge of the men's side.

GIOVANNI SAVARESE, who led NASL side New York Cosmos to three Soccer Bowl championships in five seasons, was appointed coach of MLS side Portland Timbers.

New horizons...Chile hope Reinaldo Rueda will bring success

Rueda quits Flamengo for Chile

REINALDO RUEDA left Flamengo of Brazil to become Chile's new national coach. The Colombian, who guided Honduras to the 2010 World Cup finals and won the Libertadores Cup with Atletico Nacional, replaced Juan Antonio Pizzi, who left after failing to lead the nation to the 2018 World Cup.

"I don't believe in walls. I want to go to Mexico, wear a green shirt and win honours with Leon"

Ex-USA star Landon Donovan comes out of retirement to play for Leon in Mexico

Appointments, sackings and loans

AFRICA

Serbian **SRDJAN VASILJEVIC** was appointed coach of Angola's national team, **OMAR AL MARYAMI** took charge of Libya and Frenchman **SEBASTIEN DESABRE** was named coach of Uganda.

Egypt's Zamalek named **EHAB GALAL** as their 23rd coach since club president Mortada Mansour took charge in 2014.

Former Sweden coach **ERIK HAMREN** joined South African side Mamelodi Sundowns as general manager.

ASIA

Holland international **WESLEY SNEIJDER** left Nice of Ligue 1 to join Qatar Stars League side Al Gharafa.

Former England goalkeeper **DAVID JAMES** returned to India for a second spell in charge of Kerala Blasters after they sacked Rene Meulensteen.

Next...Ehab Galal is in the Zamalek hot seat

Hong Kong champions Kitchee signed 38-year-old striker **DIEGO FORLAN**, who played 112 times for Uruguay and was named the best player at the 2010 World Cup, ahead of the group stage of the AFC Champions League.

ANGE POSTECOGLOU, who stepped down after guiding Australia to the World Cup finals, was appointed coach of J. League side Yokohama F.Marinos.

PAULO BENTO was named coach of Chinese Super League side Chongqing Lifan, nine months after he was sacked by Olympiakos. Another Portuguese coach, **VITOR PEREIRA**, replaced fellow countryman Andre Villas-Boas at Shanghai SIPG.

OUT

Gone...Albert Stuivenberg

Brief stay... Marcelo Bielsa

EUROPE

Lille terminated the contract of coach **MARCELO BIELSA** after just seven months in charge of the Ligue 1 side.

Belgium side Genk sacked Dutch coach **ALBERT STUIVENBERG**.

Sparta Prague and Czech Republic midfielder **TOMAS ROSICKY**, who won the Bundesliga with Borussia Dortmund and the FA Cup with Arsenal, announced his retirement at the age of 37.

NEIL McDONALD quit as manager of Limerick just weeks before the League of Ireland Premier Division kicked off to take up the role of assistant manager at English third-tier side Scunthorpe United.

CONCACAF

HERNAN MEDFORD parted company with Herediano after they lost in the Costa Rican Invierno play-off Final.

AFRICA

Morocco's Wydad sacked coach **HUSSEIN AMOTTA** despite winning last year's African Champions League.

Former Everton midfielder **STEVEN PIENAAR** was released by South African champions Bidvest Wits after six months.

Ronaldinho confirms retirement

A World Cup winner with Brazil in 2002, **RONALDINHO** officially announced his retirement.

The 37-year-old was *World Soccer*'s World Player of the Year in 2004 and 2005 and won the Champions League with Barcelona in 2006.

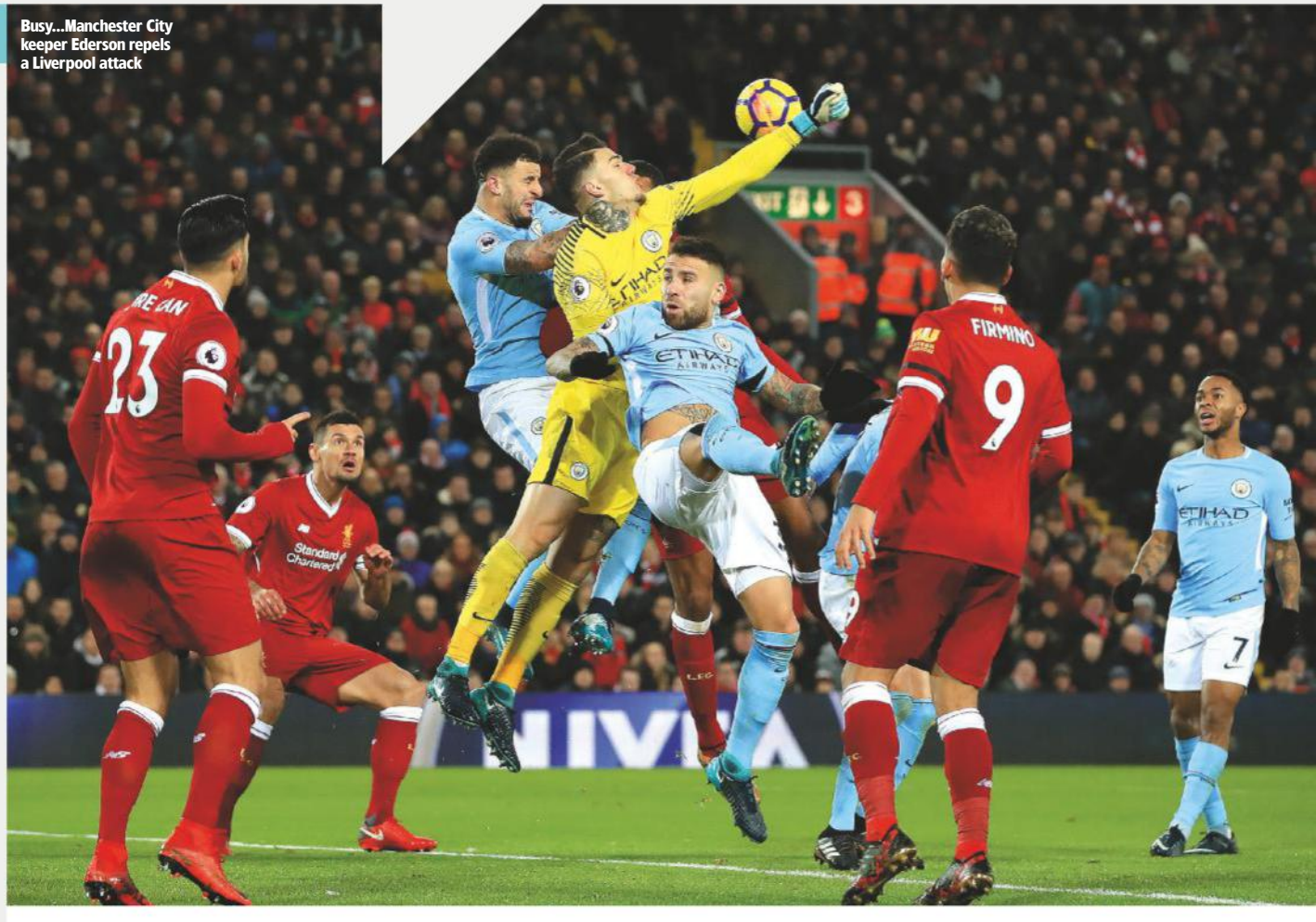
"He has stopped, it is ended," confirmed his brother and agent, Roberto Assis.

"We will do various events in Brazil, Europe and Asia and, of course, we are arranging something with the Brazilian team as well."

Goodbye...Ronaldinho has finally decided to hang up his boots

Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL



Busy...Manchester City keeper Ederson repels a Liverpool attack

Seven goals raise plenty of questions about City's defensive frailties

All the euphoria about Liverpool's recent 4-3 conquest of a previously unbeaten in the league Manchester City made scant sense to me. Instead, it evoked memories of a World Cup game played long ago: the 1970 semi-final between West Germany and Italy at the Azteca Stadium in Mexico City.

Four-three was the score that day too, with Italy prevailing against a German team whose motivator Franz Beckenbauer was forced to play on with his arm in a sling, having been badly fouled by an Italian defender.

"I'm a football man," said the late Eric Batty, once a contributor to this magazine and an embattled theorist. "But I could write poetry about that."

More to the point, I felt at the time, was the observation of an Italian journalist as we left the stadium. "*Pallacanestro*," he said, meaning basketball.

Seven goals may make a wonderfully exciting game, but they also denote two vulnerable and inadequate defences.

> Not for the first time John Stones was exposed as vulnerable

Not for the first time was John Stones, so highly praised and admired as that classic phenomenon, a footballing centre-half, exposed as vulnerable. He was a weak link in an anything but dominant City defence. When Liverpool scored on the hour, Roberto Firmino forced his way past Stones and scored in off the far post. It was not a foul on Stones; he was simply not strong enough to resist the challenge. But to give him his due he went on to have a better game than his fellow defenders Kyle Walker, Nicolas Otamendi and Fabian Delph.

The implication of Liverpool's stunning victory, which was achieved in the absence of their new £75million centre-back Virgil Van Dijk, was that they called Manchester City's bluff.

True, few teams are capable of attacking with the same sustained pace as Liverpool, but it will be interesting to see whether this defeat for City, whose last two goals came too late to affect the result, will incite other teams to take the game to City, several of whose victories have been obtained by the odd goal.

Wenger still living on borrowed time at Arsenal

In Bournemouth, Arsenal crumbled again and Jack Wilshere excelled again. No Alexis Sanchez, of course, as he prepared to leave and no Mesut Ozil either. It remains to be seen whether Arsenal can keep him as his contract runs down to the end of the season. So does that of Wilshere, but this is a player, at Arsenal since nine years old, who plainly has a commitment to the club and should surely be keen to stay.

No credit at all to the way that the failing Arsene Wenger has handled him this season, confining him for so much of it to the second-string teams which have contested the secondary European tournament. In a flaccid pedestrian Arsenal team at Bournemouth, Wilshere was still able to excel.

Ivan Gazidis seems plainly to be calling the shots now and one detects a lurking resentment in some of Wenger's recent utterances. At one press conference he made a somewhat dismissive allusion to the German, Sven Mislintat, now in charge of player recruitment, though the man has done impressively well at Borussia Dortmund.

Meanwhile, as we know, Gazidis pockets his million pounds plus a year, looking puzzlingly on the bright side about the club's recent achievements, if they may be so called, given, after so many years, the inability to finish last season in the top Premier League four and thus qualify for the European Cup.

Failing...Arsene Wenger looks on at Bournemouth

In Wenger's defence, and defence is the appropriate word, the team has badly missed French centre-back Laurent Koscielny, absent injured for some time.

Gazidis' situation calls to mind the classic restaurant-table scene at the beginning of the Marx Brothers' *A Night at the Opera*.

Margaret Dumont admonishes Groucho: "You said you would get me into society but all you have done for the last six months is draw a handsome salary." To which Groucho rejoins: "You call that nothing! How many men these days are drawing a handsome salary?"

Adopting a "Rooney rule" will make no difference

It now appears that the FA will be imposing what in the USA has come to be known as the "Rooney Rule". Nothing to do with Wayne but in fact a piece of meaningless window dressing brought in by America's National (gridiron) Football League, whereby when a club needs to appoint a new coach, it must always interview at least one black candidate.

The emphasis here is on the word "interview". There is no insistence of a black candidate being appointed.

I believe the proportion of white coaches in the NFL is some 95 per cent. For my part it would not worry me were every Premier League club to appoint a black manager.

At present the only one is Chris Hughton at Brighton, who did a splendid job in saving Newcastle United from relegation, only for the club to, sentimentally you could say, appoint their former striker Alan Shearer, who promptly went down with the ship.

Fine job... Chris Hughton

Nothing changes at Infantino's FIFA

There is surely nothing to do with FIFA but abolish it, which alas shows no sign of happening. Gianni Infantino, its Swiss chief, has no charges suggested against him, but he is grotesquely undermining the World Cup by bloating it to more than 40 finalists next but one time around, and he was very close to the now disgraced Michel Platini.

The senior appointments which he has made are both puzzling and perturbing. His deputy is a woman with no known background in football. Now another woman who has been elevated to a chief role in administrating the ethics of the game appears to be a monoglot who cannot even speak English.

How significant that the charges brought against two South American executives have been brought by crusading American prosecutors, not by any Europeans. Then you remember that Joao Havelange remained in power between 1974, when he so controversially defeated Stanley Rous, until 1998. Retiring with all his ill-gotten gains, he was shamefully indulged by all the major European countries.

The worst that happened to Havelange when found guilty of receiving a huge bribe from the ISL company was to lose his honorary Presidential status.

Regis, a late bloomer who defied the racists

The all-too-early death of that fine centre-forward Cyrille Regis raises all kinds of memories and significance.

It is shocking to read and remember the vile treatment from the terraces to which he and other black players of his generation had to contend. A lesser man would have been cowed and demoralised by such appalling treatment, but Regis was resilient enough to brush it aside and to establish a supreme playing career.

It is instructive to be reminded that Regis was aged 19 and working as an electrician on a building site when signed by West Bromwich Albion. All credit to Ronnie Allen, who first scouted him for West Brom and would later manage him.

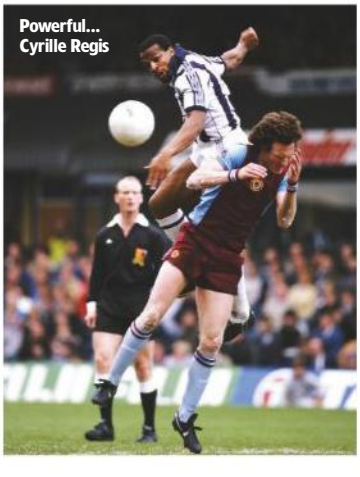
The fact Regis became professional so relatively late emphasises something which has engaged me for years: that footballers do not have to be snapped up as mere children, some at seven years or eight, to succeed in the game.

There is so much money to be made in the game nowadays that it is all too tempting and easy not only for clubs to swoop on such nascent abilities but also for parents to thrust children to the professional game, or at least try to, all too often blighting their childhood.

Regis was not only a fine and powerful footballer, but also a fully rounded personality, able to withstand the vicious abuse from racist supporters.

Today, the Premier League abounds in gifted black players. Even as late as the career of the famed John Barnes it was known for banana skins to be thrown on the pitch and for young neo-fascists to refuse to acknowledge that marvellous goal he scored in Rio against Brazil because he was black.

• *Cyrille Regis (1958-2018): see page 29*



Powerful... Cyrille Regis

Read Brian Glanville's weekly online column at worldsoccer.com

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Paul GARDNER

THE WORLDWIDE VIEW

J'ACCUSE! Why is football ignoring the problem of goalkeeper violence?

I have an accusation to level at the sport of football. Against FIFA, IFAB, the international confederations, the national federations – in fact all the governing bodies of the sport, everywhere in the world. Plus all referees. Consider the following...

Germany. September17, 2017. *Wolfsburg goalkeeper Koen Casteels races off his line and jumps heavily into Stuttgart's captain Christian Gentner. Casteels leads with a raised knee, which crashes violently into Gentner's head. Seconds later, Gentner is sprawled on the ground with eye-socket fractures, a broken nose, a fractured upper jaw and severe concussion.*

Almost certainly, his life was saved by his team doctor, who raced on to the pitch to prevent Gentner from choking on his own tongue.

A horrifying moment. Gentner was rushed to hospital. But what did football – in the person of the referee – do? The referee made no call. And his inaction was backed up by Hellmut Krug, the German referee boss, who decided that the non-call was "reasonable".

There, in those few horrifying seconds, lies the essence of my accusation. That the football powers-that-be and their referees, by not enforcing their own rules, are guilty of knowingly exposing players to serious injuries.

At the heart of this accusation lies the goalkeeper. More specifically, the way in which keepers are currently permitted to operate.

There are two types of play in which they are allowed to indulge in aggressive actions that are almost bound to cause injuries.

Firstly, they are permitted to do what Casteels did in racing forward to grab or punch high balls, leading with a raised knee which becomes a battering ram as they jump high into other players – it was estimated that Casteels' knee was 6ft above ground level when he hit Gentner. And those "other players" might also include team-mates. Given that goalkeepers are usually the bulkiest player on a team, the injuries they can cause are frightening.

Then there is that other goalkeeper specialty: diving at an opponent's feet. Allowing a player to throw himself, head-first, into ground-level action where feet are likely to be moving swiftly and viciously – does that sound like a good idea? Does it take more than a moment's thought to predict that the goalkeeper is putting himself in serious danger?

England. October14, 2006. *Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Cech dives forward to grab a loose ball. At the same time, Reading's Stephen Hunt races in, believing he can get to the ball first. In the inevitable collision, Hunt's right knee smashes into Cech's head and the keeper is rushed to hospital, where he has surgery for a depressed skull fracture. Later, medical reports say he came close to losing his life.*

Lucky...Christian Gentner receives attention

These are two ugly incidents, both resulting in near-death experiences, both involving goalkeepers, and they are not isolated examples. Goalkeepers aggressively charging into players, goalkeepers diving at feet – these are incidents that occur in virtually every game of football.

How have we reached this point where plays that are always likely to involve serious injury are regarded as acceptable?

Indeed, more than acceptable. These are actions for which keepers are frequently praised.

Listen to Brad Friedel – an experienced international keeper – in his role as a TV expert, as he watches another goalkeeper smash into an opposing forward and leave him lying stunned on the ground: "That is outstanding goalkeeping...a big strong punch, big strong body, big collision...exactly what you want."

Here's another ex-pro keeper turned TV analyst, Andy Gruenebaum of Columbus Crew, as he watches a forward get wiped out by a goalkeeper: "I think it's great goalkeeping, but also unlucky for [the forward] to get in the way of that, but that's what you're taught to do, protect yourself, you don't worry about them..."

It is not only goalkeepers who rhapsodise about the mayhem. Former Arsenal and England defender Lee Dixon, now also a TV guru, has this to say: "If you're going to come out as a goalkeeper you take everything in your way, you take the players, the ball..." Another former England defender Danny Mills, also speaking from the TV booth, had some advice for a goalkeeper who failed to get to the ball: "If he comes for that, he's got to clean everything out."

These are experienced players who have no doubts: goalkeepers are within their rights to "clean out" opponents (and team-mates). The ▸

PHOTO: Hofer Christian/action press/REX/Shutterstock

Dangerous...Koen Casteels clatters into Christian Gentner

crude insensitivity of the comments is chilling and there seems to be little or no consideration of what might happen to the players who are cleaned out. The violence inflicted is brushed aside. To Gruenebaum, a player creamed by an onrushing goalkeeper is simply unlucky, while Friedel seems almost to relish the mayhem.

Last year a player lost his life in one of these goalkeeper "collisions", although the tragedy did not get widely publicised, probably because he did not play for a big club or in a fashionable league.

Indonesia. October15, 2017. *Choirul Huda, a 38-year-old keeper with Persela Lamongan for the past 18 years, raced forward to dive at the feet of an opponent, intending to smother the ball. Instead, he collided violently with another player. Huda was rushed to hospital where he died an hour later. The player who so severely injured him – chest trauma, head trauma and neck trauma, said the doctor – was a team-mate who was trying to clear the ball.*

This episode confirms the indiscriminate violence of such incidents. The video is agonising to watch as the doomed Huda crouches on the ground, unaware that he is struggling for his life.

Back in the 1940s and 1950s, goalkeepers were much abused.

In successive FA Cup finals in England – in 1956, 1957 and 1958 – Bert Trautmann incurred a broken neck when diving at a player's feet, Ray Wood was badly injured by an unpunished tackle and Harry Gregg was roughly charged into the net along with the ball – and the goal was allowed to stand.

Change was inevitable, and it was begun by the towering and gentlemanly Russian keeper Lev Yashin, who was the first to start shouting at and organising his defenders, to "impose" his presence. The days of the submissive goalkeeper were fading. Yashin certainly added importance – and a degree of dignity – to the goalkeeper's standing, but that word, "imposing", was ominous.

Slowly, unstoppably, the goalkeeper's role grew. By 1982 the tables had turned. Now it was aggressive keepers dishing out the violence, their opponents who were the ones getting hurt. That truth was horrifically exposed when Germany met France in the 1982 World Cup.

Spain. July 8, 1982. *World Cup semi-final. As French substitute Patrick Battiston, who had been on the pitch for only eight minutes, runs on to a pass at the edge of the penalty area, German keeper Toni Schumacher comes racing towards him at full speed and simply jumps high into him, leaving him sprawled on the ground, unconscious, pale and with only a feeble pulse.*

Michel Platini ran to help and later admitted he thought Battiston was dead. Battiston is stretchered off, taken immediately to hospital with damaged vertebrae, broken ribs and three teeth knocked out.

There exists no revealing video of Schumacher's challenge, but for many it was, and remains, the most brutal foul ever seen on a football pitch. Violent goalkeeping had come of age. It was now permitted in a World Cup semi-final, where it went unpunished. Schumacher was allowed to remain on the pitch and went on to make the crucial save in Germany's penalty-kick shoot-out win.

> By 1982 the tables had turned. Now it was aggressive keepers dishing out the violence

The revolution started by Yashin was now producing a stream of large, exceptionally well-trained keepers. Goalkeeping schools flourished, while virtually every pro team now employed a specialist goalkeeper coach. No other football position received this sort of attention. Individual coaches for strikers or for creative midfielders were not part of the football scene.

The full implications of a goalkeeper "imposing" himself began to appear, and they were not pleasant. In 2012 Tottenham Hotspur's French goalkeeper Hugo Lloris ran forward to punch away a high ball and simply smashed into Swansea City's Spanish forward Michu. The collision was spectacular – Michu was knocked up into the air, then crashed heavily to the ground, unconscious. Lloris' post-game comment nicely sums up the sheer madness of the action: "I was terrified when I saw him [Michu] on the ground. I had to go for it, I had to impose myself."

Decision...a foul was awarded against Gonzalo Higuain (in blue) for this challenge

Tragedy... Choirul Huda

By 2012 the idea that goalkeepers could get away with blatant fouling – that they had to impose themselves – had taken root. Even Michu insisted that the collision was no one's fault.

The utter absurdity of allowing goalkeepers to "impose" themselves was perfectly revealed at the highest possible level in 2014.

Brazil. July13, 2014. *World Cup Final. Eleven minutes into the second half, with the score at 0-0, German goalkeeper Manuel Neuer – coming way out of his goal to punch the ball away – leaps into the back of Argentina's Gonzalo Higuain.*

Neuer's raised knee makes contact with Higuain's head and knocks him down. Referee Nicola Rizzoli awards Germany a free-kick for a foul by Higuain.

As Higuain had his back to Neuer and was not moving towards him at

Terrified...Hugo Lloris and Michu (in red)

the time of the collision, what foul had he committed? Could it be that, by 2014, merely being in a goalkeeper's way was now a foul?

Referee Rizzoli evidently had an inkling that his call made no sense as a few days later he admitted to *Corriere dello Sport* that he got the call wrong.

There was no foul, he now said, not by Higuain. Neuer had punched the ball out of play, so the restart should have been a throw-in to Argentina – but Rizzoli could not go so far as to admit that Neuer was the true culprit.

The Neuer incident is of interest because it seemed to provoke a reaction –at long last – from the rule makers.

When the 2016 rule book appeared, it included some new wording in Rule 12. Not a rule change, more a reminder of a rule that already existed, it read: "All players have a right to their position on the field of play; being in the way of an opponent is not the same as moving into the way of an opponent." It has not stopped goalkeepers from imposing themselves nor has it encouraged referees to rein in the violence.

Unconscious...Harry Gregg after being charged into the net

Perhaps the most extraordinary part of goalkeeper violence is that the two aspects raised – jumping into players and diving at feet – are both clear offences under the current rules. If an outfield player, leading with a knee, jumps forcefully into an opponent, there can be no doubt that fouls would be called, and yellow or red cards issued. But that almost never happens when it is a keeper who does the jumping.

A point about the rules involved needs to be made.

Jumping violently into an opponent is a glaringly obvious foul. But diving at an opponent's feet is not so obvious. The rule involved in this case is that covering "playing in a dangerous manner". This is defined as "any action that, while trying to play the ball, threatens injury to someone (including the player themself)..."

The example usually cited to illustrate the point is that of a player who, trying to win the ball, stoops low to head it. He is the one who may get injured, may get kicked in the head, but he is the one guilty of the foul. His head does not belong down at waist level, that is where feet rule. If a head at waist level is dangerous play, how can a head nearly at ground level (which is what always happens when keepers dive at feet) not also be dangerous play?

The fact is that the rule against lowering the head has not been thought through. A forward who dives low in the goalmouth to head a goal is unlikely to be penalised, his goal will stand, and he will get the very same tributes for bravery that the goalkeeper receives. But the legality of the goal is doubtful.

No rule change is necessary to remove the dire effects of goalkeeper violence from the game.

An admission from FIFA and/or IFAB that they have not been enforcing their own rules would be nice, but that's too much to hope for. A "clarification" of the keeper actions vis–a-vis the rules and a stipulation that the rules must be enforced would do the trick.

It is simply inexplicable that football has failed to take such action. The regular examples of serious injuries to goalkeepers and to their opponents should surely be enough to demand action.

And there is another reason, less humane but possibly more cogent – a legal reason.

Football knows that serious head injuries are involved, yet it does nothing to abolish or to at least lessen the frequency of such injuries. Goalkeeper violence injuries are inevitably part of the wider issue of head injuries and concussions. An enormous amount of research has been done over the past decade into concussions. But FIFA's

Hurt...Petr Cech

"concussion protocol" is rarely applied, so that it is a rarity to see a player removed from a game on the orders of a doctor. In any case, the protocol is not formulated to prevent concussions but rather to improve their treatment.

Sooner or later, football will find itself in court over one of these violent injuries, or deaths. Its refusal to take any steps to reduce such injuries makes it highly likely that it will lose a well-presented case. And of course, other cases will follow.

Is FIFA really unaware of what has been happening to gridiron football in the USA? In 2012, this immensely rich and popular National Football League was hit with a class-action lawsuit representing some 2,000 former players claiming compensation for concussion-related injuries.

The NFL's immediate reaction was to treat the case as a frivolous move and to seek its dismissal. But that attitude changed very quickly as the reality of the medical and legal evidence grew. Within a few months the NFL agreed to settle the case for $750million and to donate $30m for research. A federal judge then threw out the $750m agreement, saying it wasn't enough. A new agreement was announced in 2015 which is expected to cost the NFL around $1billion.

The legal – and therefore the financial – ramifications are something for FIFA to worry about. The concern here is stopping goalkeeper violence.

Strictly applying the rules to goalkeepers will certainly mean major changes in the way that they play the sport, that is undeniable, but this will not require rule changes as the rules are already in place.

For a start, "cleaning out" opponents would result in a call against the goalkeeper, and very likely a penalty. If a goalkeeper diving at an opponent's feet is called as dangerous play then the punishment would be an indirect free-kick – although a rule adjustment here and the awarding of a penalty would be helpful.

Goalkeepers, no doubt, will feel that making them obey the same rules that everybody else obeys will hamper their play. But two alterations to the keeper's playing style might be accompanied by another change designed to offer him more protection.

At the moment, that penalty box has only a minor function; so why not designate it as the goalkeeper's territory, inside which he cannot be challenged. That is something that might improve the quality of corner kicks and crosses, as dumping them in the six-yard box would be an obvious waste of effort.

Reducing the area in which a goalkeeper can handle the ball should also be considered. Shrinking the penalty area to a 12-yard box might bring a bonus as referees, with fewer penalty kicks to call, might cease to look for reasons not to make the calls.

At the moment, the keeper has become an over-protected species, so would they change anything when they know that what they are doing is considered acceptable within the sport and that referees, by routinely ignoring the sport's rules, uphold that position?

> Sooner or later, football will find itself in court over one of these violent injuries

Ugly...keeper Toni Schumacher takes out Patrick Battiston

If FIFA cannot bring itself to show concern at the unnecessary injuries its sport involves, even if it continues to feel safe ignoring the legal aspects, there is still another argument that demands action.

The future of football depends on the worldwide enrolment of youngsters – but will parents be eager for their sons or daughters to play a sport that appears unable to take concussions seriously? WS

"His biggest weakness was he didn't score enough bad goals. Every goal he scored was a wonder goal"

Former West Bromwich Albion manager Ron Atkinson remembers Cyrille Regis

OBITUARIES

Cyrille REGIS (1958-2018)

The former West Bromwich Albion, Coventry City and England striker died suddenly from a heart attack, aged 59.

An outstanding centre-forward who combined pace and power with precision and elegance, Regis was a pioneer for black footballers in the 1980s and 1990s.

"We stood on his shoulders," said Dion Dublin, the former Coventry forward. "There was something about Cyrille that myself and Brian Deane, Wrighty [Ian Wright], Les Ferdinand...we were the players that looked at those kind of players and thought we want to play, we want to be like you."

Former Crystal Palace and Sheffield Wednesday striker Mark Bright describes Regis as "an inspiration to myself and many players of my era – he blazed a trail for every black player who followed."

Born in French Guiana, Regis moved to England at the age of one with his family, who settled in west London. He played non-league football for Molesey and then Hayes, while training as an electrician, before being scouted at the age of 19 by West Brom, who paid £10,000.

At West Brom, he starred in an exciting Ron Atkinson-managed side that finished third in Division One in 1979, their highest league placing for many years. They were notable for regularly fielding three black players – Regis, Laurie Cunningham and Brendan Batson – who Atkinson dubbed the "Three Degrees" after the all-girl pop group of the time.

Racism from the terraces was rife – boos and bananas were regularly aimed at black players – and Regis earned praise for his dignity in the face of such provocative discrimination.

"In full flow there wasn't a better sight in football," recalls Atkinson. "Visiting fans took to him. I can remember us playing at Leeds and we were all getting abuse, but he scored two wonder goals and afterwards he got a standing ovation from the Leeds crowd."

Power...in action for West Brom at Chelsea

Dignity...Regis made his name at West Brom

He moved on to Coventry City where he won the only silverware of his career, the 1987 FA Cup. He also played five times for England, making his debut against Northern Ireland at Wembley in 1982. He was only the third black player to represent England at senior level, after Viv Anderson and Cunningham.

Regis' impact on football was felt far beyond that of his immediate colleagues.

Liam Rosenior, the current Brighton & Hove Albion defender, and son of former West Ham United striker Leroy Rosenior, said of Regis: "You were my dad's hero.

"You were the man he based his game on – watching not only your world-class, outstanding, centre-forward play and goals for West Brom as a teenager – but also the elegance, determination and drive to perform at the incredible level you did in the face of cruel, inhumane abuse directed at you for the perceived 'crime' of the colour of your skin."

Regis ended his career with Wycombe Wanderers after spells with Aston Villa and Wolverhampton Wanderers.

Papa CAMARA (1951-2018)
Played in five African Club Champions Cup Finals – winning three with Guinean club Hafia in 1972, 1975 and 1977 – and helped the country to the Final of the 1976 African Nations Cup, the furthest Guinea have progressed in the competition. As a coach he led Guinea to the 1994 Nations Cup finals.

Edu FERREIRA (1997-2017)
Aged just 20, the Boavista striker passed away on Christmas Eve after battling against cancer. He had started training with the club's first-team squad at the beginning of last season but was forced to retire and receive treatment following the discovery of a tumour in a leg.

Young...Edu Ferreira

Juan Carlos GARCIA (1988-2018)
Left-back who made more than 30 appearances for Honduras and played at the 2014 World Cup. He was diagnosed with leukaemia on returning to English side Wigan Athletic in 2015 after a loan spell at Spanish club Tenerife.

Tommy LAWRENCE (1940-2018)
Former goalkeeper who missed just four league matches in six seasons as Liverpool won the league championship twice and lifted the FA Cup. Won three caps for Scotland.

Red hero...Lawrence

Regis MANON (1965-2018)
Part of the squad that helped Gabon qualify for their first-ever African Nations Cup finals in 1994, the striker was an international for more than a decade and played in France for Tours before coaching club sides in his homeland.

Ted PHILLIPS (1933-2018)
Partnered Ray Crawford up front when Ipswich Town won the First Division title in 1962, having been with the team since their days in the Third Division South. He scored 181 goals in 295 games for Ipswich and still holds the club record for goals in a season with 46.

eye witness

James Montague in Doha

QATAR

The centre of a global storm

Preparations for the 2022 World Cup are being threatened by a political crisis in the Middle East

It wasn't the gilded welcome Qatar has become accustomed to from its peers over the past decade, but it was the welcome that the Gulf state is increasingly coming to terms with thanks to the new rules of the new game.

The 2017 Gulf Cup isn't usually a tournament that makes international headlines. Taking place every two years, the competition has been going since 1970 and features all the states with a coastline on the Persian Gulf, plus Yemen but minus Iran. The competition's 26th edition was due to be held in Iraq, but security issues saw the hosting rights move to Kuwait. When Kuwait was suspended by FIFA over political interference in the running of its federation, the Gulf Cup was sent to Qatar. And then almost half the teams involved – Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates – refused to play.

The switch to Qatar made sense at the time as, over the past two decades, it has undergone a phenomenal transformation which has put this tiny country – by many counts is the richest in the world – at the centre of global football, with the 2022 World Cup finals now less than five years away.

Aspire, the controversial state-funded sports academy, plays a pivotal role in spreading Qatari footballing influence around the world and is in charge of nurturing the nation's under-19 and under-23 national teams. And it is from these sides that the Qatar Football Association (QFA) hopes the players will emerge to take on the world's best.

Using Qatari state money, Aspire has also gone into club ownership, buying Eupen in Belgium's top flight and Cultural Leonesa in the Spanish second tier. A partnership deal was recently signed with Leeds United, with Ivan Bravo, a board member at the Championship side, also director-general of Aspire.

Top teams from around the world now hold winter training camps at Aspire's state-of-the-art facilities. Bayern Munich, who arrived for winter training, announced a sleeve sponsorship deal with Qatar's Hamad International Airport last year, while Qatari cash, having previously purchased Paris Saint-Germain, brought Neymar to the French capital.

There has, of course, been intense criticism of all of this, especially over claims that the 2022 World Cup bid was "bought" through backhanders and backroom political deals – something that has been raked over in a New York

Training camp...Bayern Munich (in red) play a friendly at the Aspire Academy

Vision...how the Khalifa Stadium might look in 2022

courthouse. Accusations that the purchase of PSG was in exchange for Michel Platini's vote for Qatar 2022 is something the then-UEFA president strenuously denies.

In addition, there has been the issue of human rights and the appalling treatment of the migrant workers who are building the stadiums and infrastructure. Then, of course, there was the problem of staging a World Cup during a Gulf summer, when temperatures regularly surpass 50 degrees Celsius – a temperature that could endanger the lives of players and spectators, even in the proposed air-conditioned stadiums.

Yet, by and large, Qatar had weathered these problems.

For FIFA, changing the World Cup hosts could have opened up a legal case that would bankrupt it. So, in 2015, football's world governing body confirmed that the finals would now be played in the northern

Confident...Nasser Al Khater, a senior figure on the World Cup organising body

hemisphere's winter, with the Final taking place on December 18. In the meantime, reform has begun on treatment of migrant workers, prompting some of the state's most intransigent critics, including the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), to offer grudging praise.

And then, on June 5 last year, an unexpected political crisis questioned all the optimism and certainty. Qatar's neighbours announced a political and economic freeze on relations. All air, sea and road links were suspended, including food shipments and building materials needed for the vast World Cup project.

The Qataris called it a "blockade"; Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain called it a necessary move to curtail Qatar's alleged support of terrorism and its relationship with Iran, a country that shares a natural gas field in the Persian Gulf with Qatar but who the Saudis in particular view as a threat to the region.

Much of the televised football in the region is broadcast by Qatar-funded TV network beIN Sports, and when Egypt joined the blockade its players and coaches refused to answer any questions posed by journalists from beIN sport at press conferences. According to a report by *The New York Times*, one beIN commentator attending a crucial World Cup qualifier in Saudi Arabia was removed from the stadium, questioned and had some of his equipment impounded.

By the time December came into view, and with no end to this crisis in sight, it looked like the Gulf Cup was dead.

However, at the last minute, the Qataris agreed to move the tournament back to Kuwait – who had just been reinstated by FIFA – and the tournament, miraculously, went ahead. "I would like to congratulate and thank the Qatari football authorities for their honourable gesture," said FIFA president Gianni Infantino, who attended the opening match of the tournament.

"The solidarity and friendship shown by all illustrates once again the power of football to unite people across borders."

This, though, was far from the case. There were rumblings that Saudi Arabia and the UAE would refuse to play Qatar if they met in the knockout stage, although in the end that was academic as neither Qatar nor Saudi Arabia got out of their group. But events had shaken the Qataris and FIFA.

QFA boss...Hamad Bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al Thani (centre)

Plan...stadium air-con was proposed to combat the heat

When the 2022 World Cup comes around, perhaps the biggest threat to the tournament won't be the allegations of corruption or human rights abuses, but rather the host's Arab neighbours and a political crisis that shows no sign of abating.

Back in October, there were few outward signs that much had changed in Qatar since the crisis began. Turkish dairy products had replaced those sourced from Saudi Arabia and UAE, while taxi drivers complained of fewer fares from the airport as all flights between the participating countries had been halted. The Qatari Stars League had resumed and its biggest star, Xavi, had turned up for duty for his final season as a player. The most visible change was the huge, black and white images of the Emir Tamim, who became ruler when his father stepped down in 2013, that seemed to hang from every skyscraper in support of the royal family.

The national team even got into the act during a World Cup qualifier against South Korea in Doha a few weeks after the political crisis began, with the players wearing T-shirts bearing an image of the

Flashpoint...players from Qatar (in white) and Bahrain confront each other during the 2017 Gulf Cup

Emir's face – an act that saw the QFA fined $51,800 by FIFA.

During the first three months of the crisis, according to the ratings agency Moody's, Qatar's government spent £30billion to stave off financial collapse as supply lines were altered and ties were deepened with Turkey and Iran. As Marc Lynch wrote in *The Washington Post*: "Saudi Arabia and the UAE radically overstated their prospects for success and failed to have a plausible plan B in case things did not go to plan."

But the money can't last forever, even with a total reserve – thanks to years of high natural-gas prices – of an estimated £250bn. Moody's also suggested there might be trouble ahead with World Cup building projects as some 70 per cent of materials had been imported from Saudi Arabia and UAE before the crisis. Finding new Turkish suppliers for yoghurt is one thing; steel and concrete is quite another.

Loyal...Qatar players wear T-shirts bearing portraits of Emir Tamim

Still, in a TV studio in a quiet suburb of Doha, not far from the Aspire complex, the talk was resolutely about football.

Deep inside a warren of corridors and offices of the Al Kass TV network, 10 men were sitting on cushions placed next to each other against a wall. This was the set of *Al Majlis*, arguably the most-watched football talk show in the Gulf. The set is modelled on a traditional Arabic majlis, a room found in many houses which is used to entertain guests and talk long into the night.

The group argue about every incident in every single televised Qatar Stars League match. Sometimes it gets heated, but it always ascends, eventually, into good natured humour. Shows don't finish until the guests decide they are finished. A producer, working on a busy editing desk as other young Qataris buzz around him, revealed that sometimes the show can go on for 12 hours.

Today's guests include Younis Mahmoud, Iraq's 2007 Asian Cup-winning captain, former Qatar international Majed Al Khelaifi, who runs the Doha Stadium Plus website and former Bahrain keeper Hamood Sultan. During the show, Sultan and Mahmoud re-enact an obvious error that the referee made.

"When the referee makes a big mistake with a big club in Qatar, everyone wants to talk, you know," says the host, Khaled Jassim, who controls the competing voices with persuasion and a natural authority rather than an iron fist.

Sitting in his office, after filming, he explains: "And that is what happens with my show. Everyone wants to talk. It takes time." And it is a show with a huge audience – Jassim has three quarters of a million Twitter followers.

The 2022 World Cup is never far away and it has been something of a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, there is pride in the fact the biggest sporting event in the world is coming to Doha. On the other, it has brought a microscope onto a country that perhaps wasn't ready for it, especially when it comes to the issue of naturalisations and worker rights.

> "In Qatar, we are not the best country in the world. Sure, there's mistakes. It happens. We will make good things for labourers in Qatar"
>
> **TV host Khaled Jassim**

"In Qatar, we are not the best country in the world. Sure, there's mistakes. It happens," admits Jassim. "We will make good things for labourers in Qatar."

While Qatar and FIFA have been dragged to the table on the issue of kafala and worker rights, meaningful change has been announced, change that is unlikely to have happened without the political crisis – and certainly not at the speed it has.

In October a six-point plan was announced, abolishing kafala and introducing a base minimum wage for all workers regardless of where they came from, eliminating the race-based wages that existed before. Employers would no longer be able to stop employees leaving the country and contracts would be lodged with a central authority, ending the practice of workers being offered one wage and receiving another.

"The new guidance from Qatar signals

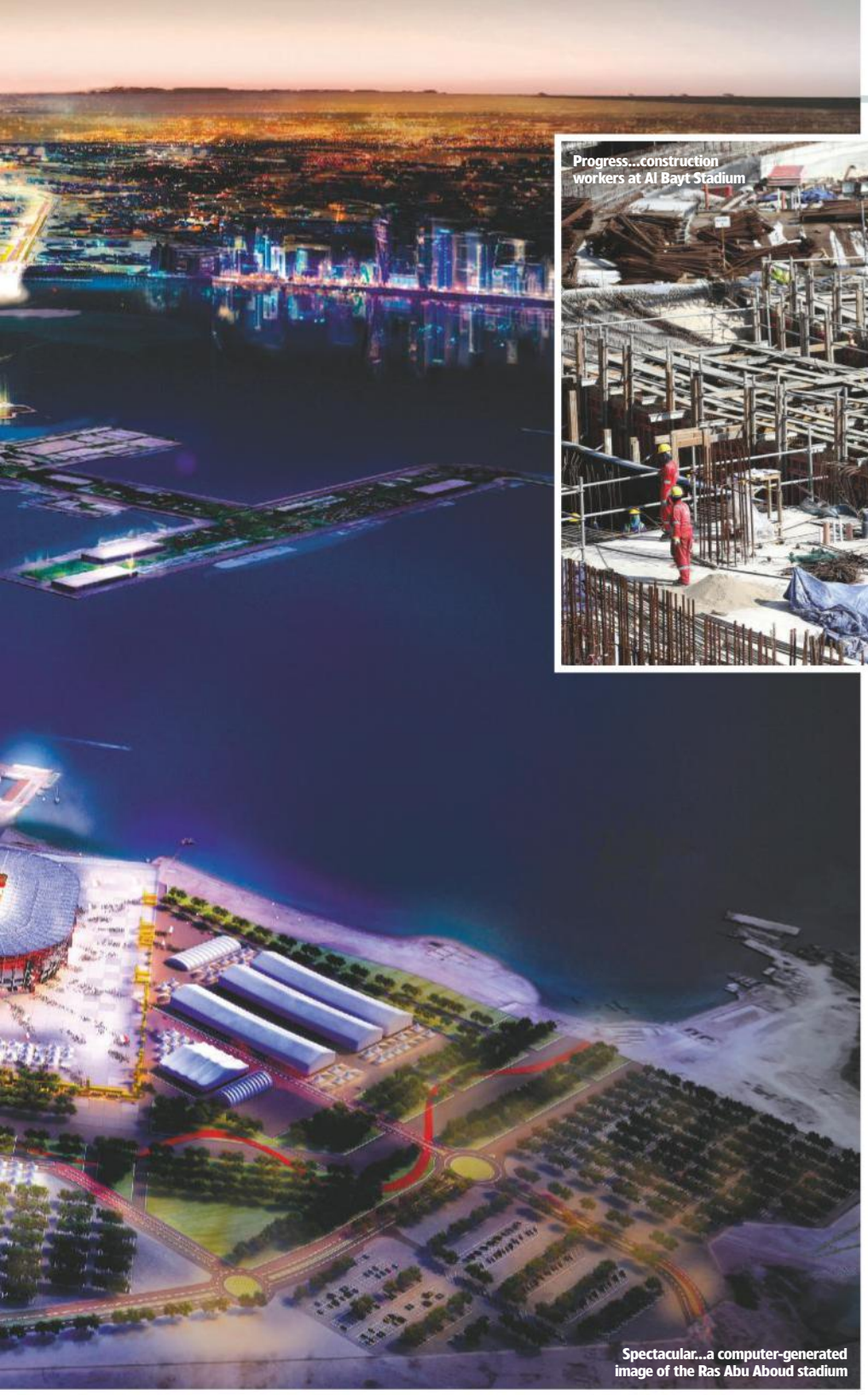
Helping hand...Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan (right), with Emir Tamim

> "The new guidance from Qatar signals the start of real reforms which will bring to an end the use of modern slavery"
>
> **ITUC general-secretary, Sharan Burrow**

the start of real reforms in Qatar which will bring to an end the use of modern slavery and put the country on the pathway to meeting its international legal obligations on workers' rights," says ITUC general-secretary Sharan Burrow, who had been a staunch critic. And, in January, Human Rights Watch (HRW), who had also been heavily critical of Qatar's record on workers' rights, released a report that praised its reforms. Qatar had "responded to a breakdown in neighbourly relations by raising the bar on human rights standards in the Gulf," says HRW's Belkis Wille.

For Jassim it is the hypocrisy that is problematic. He has seen construction workers, he says, go unpaid in the UK and sees little criticism of naturalising athletes when it happens elsewhere.

"You know Mohamed Farah? He is Somalian, yes? But he got the British passport and got good results in the Olympiad," says Jassim. But Qataris,



Progress...construction workers at Al Bayt Stadium

Spectacular...a computer-generated image of the Ras Abu Aboud stadium

he believes, are still behind the finals. "Please come to the country, to talk, to experience the country," he adds. "Watch my tournament. Watch my life. It is a good time to support this tournament."

Even after the past few months, like most Arabs in the region he still hopes a solution could be found. "This tournament is not for Qatar only," believes Jassim. "It is for the Middle East, for Arab countries, for the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council]".

That sentiment was tested somewhat just a few days later by a bizarre sequence of events when it was reported that the ex-Bahraini international Sultan – who is a regular on *Al Majlis* – had been arrested when he returned to Manama after filming.

Bahrain had passed a law that made any statements about Qatar that showed "sympathy or favouritism" a criminal offence with a punishment of five years in prison and a fine. Sultan's appearance on the show appeared to contradict that, although the Bahraini authorities said he had not been arrested. Later he filmed a video denying he'd been arrested and that he was safe and well.

However, a source on the show, who requested anonymity, claimed that Sultan had been questioned and was released only after a Gulf-wide online protest was organised. "The video was to cool things down," said the source.

Local league... Al Rayyan (in red) take on Al Saad

There is a long way to go before the first game of the 2022 World Cup and there seems to be few avenues to defuse the current crisis – and, if anything, it could get worse. A report by *Business Insider* analysed satellite footage of the stadiums being built in Qatar and found there had been little progress since June.

"These images are not true representations of the incredible progress we've made despite the blockade," says Hassan Al Thawadi, secretary-general of the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy. "This illegal blockade doesn't affect our plans."

Even more controversial was a report in *The Economist* that Qatar and Iran were in early discussions about staging some World Cup games, with the host's promise of 100,000 hotel rooms unlikely to be met. The possibility of using cruise ships, even repurposed labour camps, was raised. In December, the QFA signed a "Memorandum of Understanding" with the Iranian federation outlining cooperation regarding their respective national teams. But a Supreme Committee spokesperson claimed that reports of Iran hosting were entirely false, stating: "Qatar is the sole host of the 2022 FIFA World Cup and will host the 64 matches of the tournament across eight planned venues."

Still, the reports are unlikely to help any detente with Riyadh or Abu Dhabi.

With less than five years to go, there's a very real possibility the region's brutal and fast-moving political calculus will have the ultimate say and that the hugely expensive and much trumpeted 2022 World Cup might resemble the recent Gulf Cup: riven by politics, tit for tat accusations and, ultimately, a tournament that doesn't take place in Qatar. WS

It's a knockout

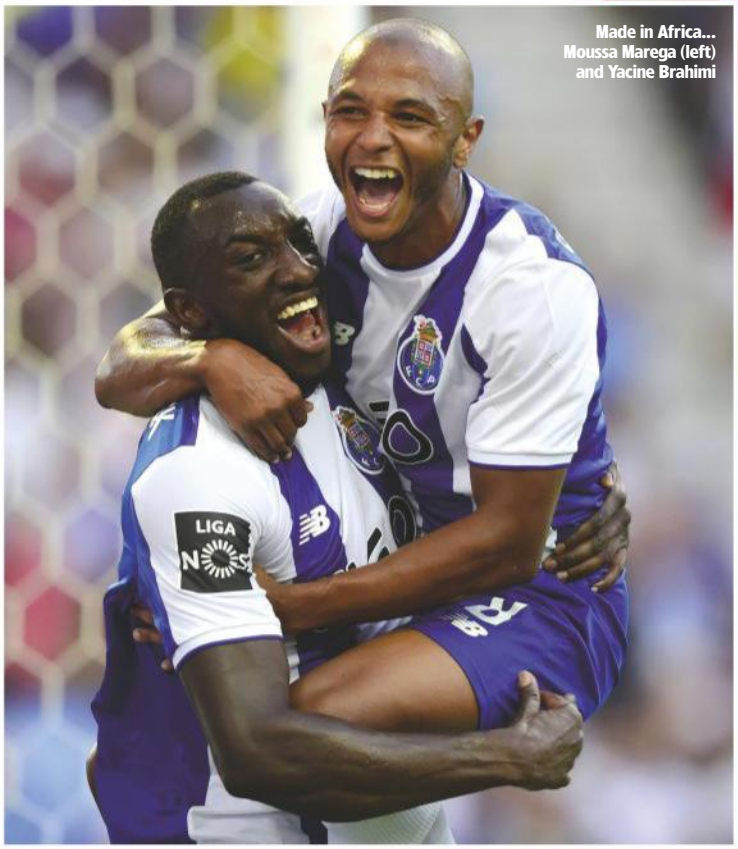
As the Champions League gets serious, what are the big questions facing the last 16 contenders?

PORTO: Can Aboubakar keep scoring?
One player Liverpool most definitely will have to neutralise if they are to reach the last eight of the Champions League is Porto striker Vincent Aboubakar.

A keen writer in his spare time – the 25-year-old is never happier than when penning his thoughts on the universe and the meaning of life – the Cameroon international is not quite as poetic in his day job, but he has certainly proved effective this season for the Portuguese club. He scored five times in the Champions League group phase and many more domestically.

Bearing in mind his rich vein of form in the current campaign – and his ball-juggling winning goal for the Indomitable Lions in their African Nations Cup triumph last year – many thought he should have featured in the three-man shortlist for CAF's Player of the Year award for 2017. He was, however, overlooked, although that may have been a decision that was swayed by Cameroon's shock failure to make the World Cup finals.

Not that he's particularly upset. "Mohamed Salah, Sadio Mane and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang [the three nominees] all are formidable players and deserve respect," he told *France Football*. "I don't focus on individual awards, I think they can create conflict. Achievements as a team count for much more."



Made in Africa... Moussa Marega (left) and Yacine Brahimi

Revitalised... Vincent Aboubakar

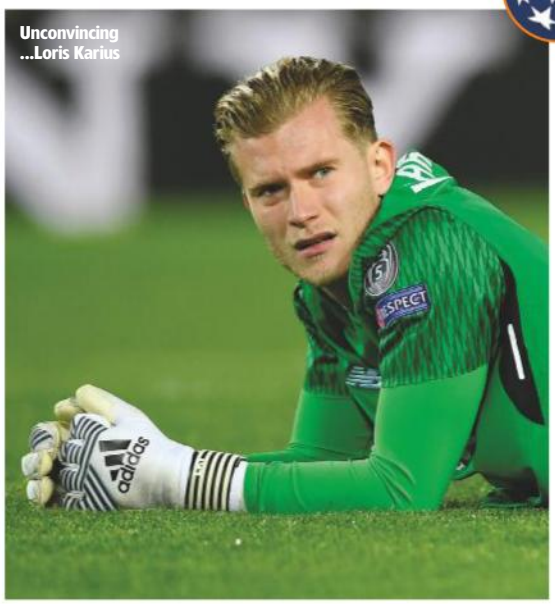
> "I don't focus on individual awards, I think they can create conflict. Achievements as a team count for much more"
> Vincent Aboubakar

Much of Porto's creativity and firepower has an African source: Aboubakar leading the line with a rare blend of power, energy and finesse; his Malian side-kick Moussa Marega; and Algeria's Yacine Brahimi supplying the craft on the left side.

"It's not often you see such a complete front man," says Brahimi. "He's technical, strong and rapid."

The irony is that Porto came very close to selling "Abou" last

Preview



Unconvincing ...Loris Karius

LIVERPOOL: Can the Reds' back line cope?
The Merseysiders have undoubtedly stiffened their rearguard with the acquisition of Dutch centre-back Virgil Van Dijk, but it's a pity the same cannot be said about the goalkeeping spot, where Simone Mignolet and Loris Karius both have their shortcomings. Porto normally go with a 4-4-2 under coach Sergio Conceicao, but there is absolutely nothing old-fashioned and staid in the way he interprets the system, insisting on high-energy press, non-stop attacking intent and bags of boldness. Like Jose Mourinho, Conceicao likes nothing better than to get under the skin of the opposition.

BASLE: Will transfer-window reinforcements in midfield make the difference?
In their January recruitment drive the Swiss champions focused on re-signing former players such as Fabian Frei (Mainz), Valentin Stocker (Hertha Berlin) and Samuele Campo (Lausanne). All are midfielders, thus indicating a major overhaul in this area.

MANCHESTER CITY: Will intense pressing by the opposition prove to be their undoing?
As illustrated by their 4-3 loss at Liverpool, City can be dismantled by a pressing blitz. Pep Guardiola's back line often looked panicky at Anfield, clearly missing the composure of injured centre-back Vincent Kompany.

BAYERN MUNICH: Can Rodriguez provide the X Factor?
Brought in on loan from Real Madrid last summer, Colombian attacking midfielder James Rodriguez started timidly at the Allianz-Arena but has really come into his own since Jupp Heynckes replaced Carlo Ancelotti as coach. He is creative, busy and tuned into the collective.

Creative...James Rodriguez takes on Dani Alves of PSG

summer. On the club's books since 2014 but loaned out last season to Turkish side Besiktas, he was not especially enthused by a return to Portugal. He understandably thought that the club had lost faith in him and he was courted by Marseille, who saw him as a key component in their rebuilding programme.

But it was all to change for the Yaounde-born marksman on his return to pre-season training. Instead of more bad vibes he fell under the spell of new Porto coach Sergio Conceicao and quickly established himself as the team's attacking focal point.

"Straightaway I felt I had a good chemistry with Conceicao," says Aboubakar. "He was very honest with me. I appreciate people who are direct and speak their minds. He's made me a better player, helped me get to that next level."

According to Aboubakar, the Liverpool tie will be a 50-50 affair. "It's wide-open," he claims. "The team which is the most motivated and ambitious will go through."

BESIKTAS: Can Negredo fill the gap left by Cenk at centre-forward?
With the mid-season sale of striker Cenk Tosun to Everton, the Black Eagles have lost a great deal of their cutting edge up front. Spanish striker Alvaro Negredo may struggle to fill the resultant void.

Struggle... Alvaro Negredo

JUVENTUS: Can Dybala recapture his electric form?
When talented Argentinian striker Paulo Dybala wrapped up a 3-1 win at relegation battlers Verona at the end of December with two splendid goals, it seemed like a perfect end to the year for Juventus fans. Not only had Juve concluded a highly successful Christmas holiday programme that had begun with a 1-0 home win against Roma, but the two goals from Dybala seemed to announce a return to top form of a player who is widely seen as one of the jewels in the team' crown.

The point about Dybala is that it had been a very strange first half of the season for him.

After a dramatic start, by the end of October he was second to Lazio's Ciro Immobile in the Serie A scoring chart with 11 goals. Yet by Christmas Eve, a full two months later, his tally had increased by just one, to 12.

Dybala's relative loss of form prompted the inevitable flood of media speculation as to what might be wrong. Was he suffering from a physical problem? Did he have off-the-field problems of a romantic kind?

Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri added fuel to the speculative fire when he opted to drop Dybala for a couple of games in December, including a clash with Internazionale that ended goalless. It was in that context that Dybala's two goals against Verona seemed to announce the end of his "crisis", be it supposed or real.

Nothing matters as much as the Champions League. Losing two of the last three Finals hurt

However, the relief that Juventus and their fans experienced at the news of his recovery did not last long. One week later, in Juve's first game of the new year, a 1-0 win at Cagliari, Dybala hobbled off five minutes into the second half, with a right-thigh muscular problem.

For the first half of the game, he had been looking good, coming close to scoring when he hit the crossbar with a free-kick. But as he came off, visibly distressed, it was obvious that the first serious problem in Juve's spring Champions League campaign had just materialised. Would he be ready in time for February's home game against Tottenham Hotspur?

The club's medical staff put a recovery time of 30-40 days on the injury, which must make Dybala a doubtful starter. And he is not their only doubt.

Goalkeeper and captain Gigi Buffon, who turns 40 at the end of January, also looks unlikely to feature against Spurs. Out of action since Juve's 1-0 away win against Napoli at the start of December, Buffon's return will not be rushed, especially since his replacement, Polish international Wojciech Szczesny, has looked very assured in his absence.

And there is a problem in midfield, where Claudio Marchisio has been struggling to regain his best form following a serious knee injury in August which kept him of the side until the end of October.

Injuries notwithstanding, this is the big one for Juventus. A seventh consecutive league title is one thing but, in truth, nothing matters as much as the Champions League.

Losing two of the last three Finals hurt.

Danger man...Paulo Dybala (right) takes on Sebastian Coates of Sporting

Problem...Dybala (far left) hobbles off against Cagliari

Preview

CHELSEA: Where will the goals come from?
In his first season in England, former Real Madrid and Juventus striker Alvaro Morata has, for the most part, failed to convince, and his problems have had a knock-on effect on Eden Hazard, who at times has been carrying the Blues attack on his own.

With Diego Costa back at Atletico Madrid, and boss Antonio Conte not trusting Michy Batshuayi, Chelsea did not follow through interest in Manchester-bound Alexis Sanchez and were linked with injury-prone Andy Carroll of West Ham United, who had the advantage of not being cup-tied in Europe.

Unconvincing... Alvaro Morata

BARCELONA: Can the supporting cast step up?
For in-form Barca it's been a season of stellar work from their supposed supporting cast. Always in the right place at the right time, new midfielder Paulinho has proved an invaluable source of goals, while at right-back Sergi Roberto has improved his final ball beyond all recognition.

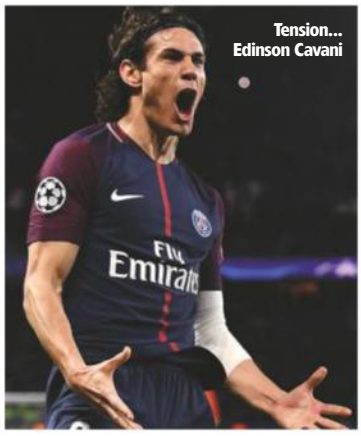
Improved... Sergi Roberto

The middle ranks will be needed to supplement star names Lionel Messi and Luis Suarez as record signing Philippe Coutinho is cup-tied for the Champions League and last summer's big transfer arrival, Ousmane Dembele, is out injured again.

REAL MADRID: Will this be the last season for the club's BBC strike force?
This season the famed BBC front line has withered as a goalscoring force, with Karim Benzema out of sorts, Gareth Bale struggling with injury and Cristiano Ronaldo often anonymous.

With coach Zinedine Zidane under increasing pressure to play with extra width in the attacking third, one possible solution could be more game time for Marco Asensio.

PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN: Can Neymar and Cavani overcome their reported differences?
Rumours have been circulating all season of divisions between Uruguayan striker Edinson Cavani and Brazilian superstar Neymar, with matters coming to a head again in January against Dijon.


Tension... Edinson Cavani

Leading 7-0, PSG were awarded a late penalty but Neymar would not allow Cavani the chance to beat the club record of 156 goals set by Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

Vital... Toby Alderweireld

Gone...Eduardo Berizzo celebrates with his Sevilla players

SEVILLA: Can Montella turn things around?
Vincenzo Montella was the surprise choice to replace Eduardo Berizzo as coach of Sevilla in December – not only because he himself had been sacked weeks earlier by Milan, but also because of the manner of Berizzo's departure.

The Argentinian was dispatched just before Christmas, a week after returning from a period of treatment for prostate cancer.

Although 48-year-old Berizzo left with Sevilla in sixth place in La Liga and having reached the knockout stage of the Champions League – and been drawn with Manchester United – there was a feeling that the former Celta Vigo coach had not imposed his style on the side since replacing Jorge Sampaoli, who left to take charge of Argentina, last summer.

Berizzo departed after a run of five matches without a win and there were reports of fallouts with players – notably midfielder Steven Nzonzi, who walked out of the stadium at half-time during the Champions League group game with Liverpool, when Sevilla came from 3-0 down to draw 3-3.

It was after that game that news broke of Berizzo's cancer diagnosis, provoking public sympathy that was not replicated by the club's hierarchy.

Javi Gracia, Luis Enrique and Laurent Blanc were among those considered to be possible contenders to replace Berizzo – only for Sevilla to wrong-foot everyone with the announcement of Montella.

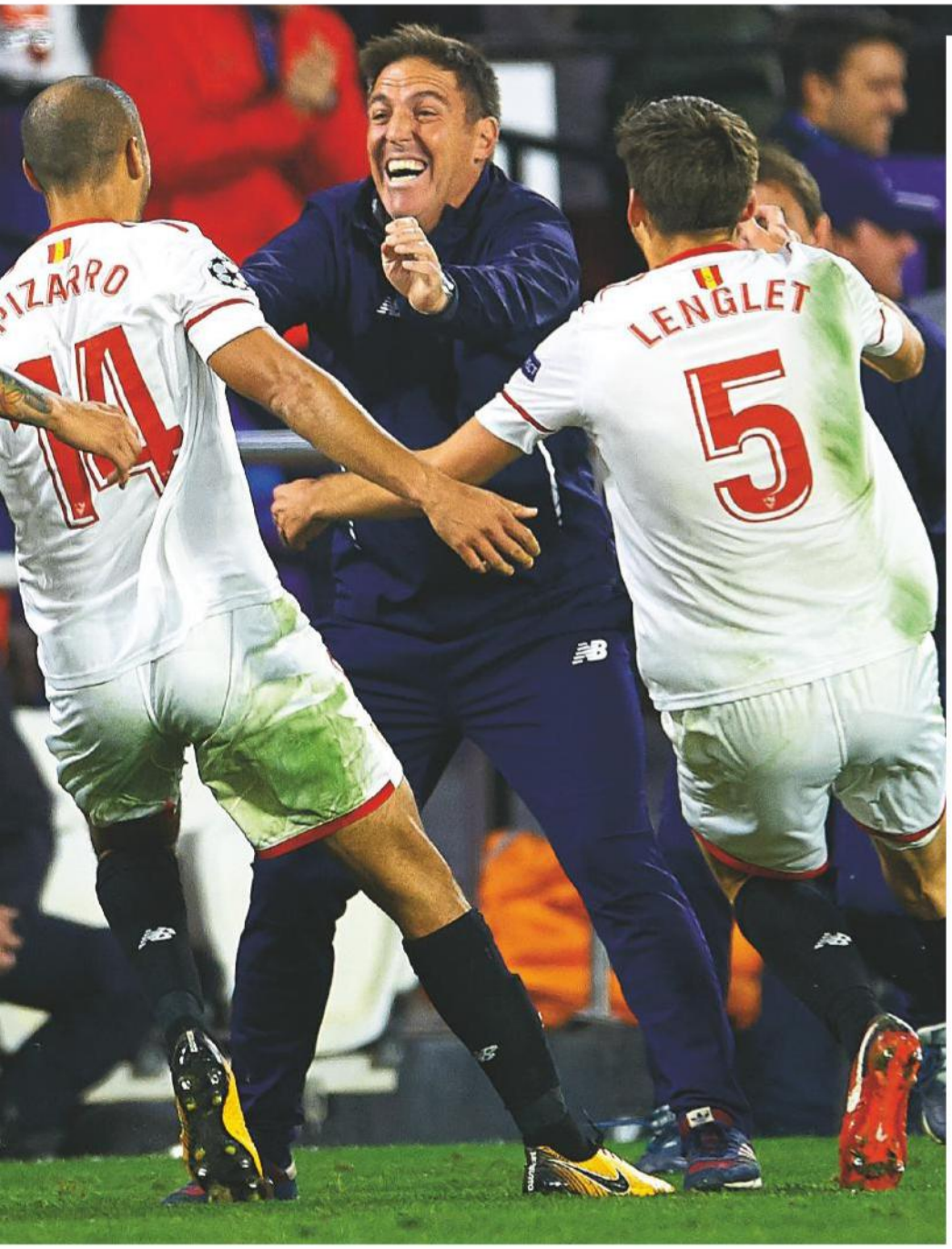
The 43-year-old Italian's arrival was attacked by former Sevilla player Diego Maradona, who wrote on Instagram: "It is crazy that Montella should take Berizzo's place. Especially when Montella was kicked out for doing so badly at Milan. There are thousands of coaches who could do the job."

Even Montella admitted he was "surprised" to be appointed. "We have to have passion and spirit," he said. "If we try to play football, that will be later on."

Italian coaches have not been successful in Spain of late. Cesare Prandelli lasted 10 games at Valencia in autumn 2016, while this season Gianni De Biasi had just nine games in charge of Alaves. But Sevilla's sporting director Oscar Arias has insisted that Montella is "an Italian coach who breaks the normal Italian mould".

Montella has been joined by Enzo Maresca, the former Sevilla midfielder, as his assistant but they faced a baptism of fire in their first game, which turned out to be an epic Seville derby that was won 5-3 by city rivals Real Betis. It was the first time in

Fire power...Roma will look to Eden Dzeko (in white)



ROUND OF 16

FIRST LEG

FEBRUARY 13
Juventus v Tottenham Hotspur
Basle v Manchester City

FEBRUARY 14
Porto v Liverpool
Real Madrid v Paris Saint-Germain

FEBRUARY 20
Chelsea v Barcelona
Bayern Munich v Besiktas

FEBRUARY 21
Sevilla v Manchester United
Shakhtar Donetsk v Roma

SECOND LEG

MARCH 6
Liverpool v Porto
Paris Saint-Germain v Real Madrid

MARCH 7
Tottenham Hotspur v Juventus
Manchester City v Basle

MARCH 13
Manchester United v Sevilla
Roma v Shakhtar Donetsk

MARCH 14
Besiktas v Bayern Munich
Barcelona v Chelsea

QUARTER-FINALS

First leg: April 3, 4
Second leg: April 10, 11

SEMI-FINALS

First leg: April 24, 25
Second leg: May 1, 2

FINAL

May 26, Kiev

Sevilla's history they had conceded five goals to their neighbours and the first time they had been beaten at home since 2016, a run going back 29 games.

The derby defeat was followed by a 1-0 loss at struggling Alaves, prompting forward Nolito to call on Sevilla supporters to rally around the slumping side. "We need more love," he said. "When you're in a run of poor results, you have to stick together. It's easy to become demoralised."

Nzonzi was back in the starting line-up for the Spanish Cup quarter-final meeting with Atletico, the first leg of which Sevilla came from behind to win 2-1. "It gives us a lot of confidence and conviction, but I repeat that it is only a start," Montella said. "Today we risked a little more, which is what I want to see. "The team was very compact, I see evolution in our game. It takes time whenever there is a change of coach."

SHAKHTAR DONETSK: Can Fred make his presence felt?
Just one of many Brazilians in the Ukraine side's squad, Fred is the player they simply cannot do without. A box-to-box gladiator with skills, athleticism and drive to burn, he could be on his way to Manchester City next season.

New Sevilla boss... Vincenzo Montella

ROMA: Do they have enough goals in them?
A team which has suffered a string of eye-watering Champions League capitulations in the past, the *Giallorossi* are an altogether more resilient unit these days. They are extremely well-organised defensively by coach Eusebio Di Francesco, but while they may be hard to beat, they have been lacking in firepower.

TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR: Will Alderweireld be fit in time?
Crucial to Spurs' hopes of seeing off Juventus is the physical condition of Belgian centre-back Toby Alderweireld. Arguably their most accomplished defender, he has been out since November with a hamstring injury.

MANCHESTER UNITED: Can new signing Sanchez make an immediate impact?
The expensive hiring of Chilean striker Alexis Sanchez from Arsenal has given United a new attacking threat, but Jose Mourinho's side need to take their chances and avoid letting in sloppy goals. Above all, they will need key midfielder Paul Pogba to be on his game.

Preview

No magic behind Potter miracle

English coach working wonders at Swedish club Ostersund

As indicated by his surname, there is more than a hint of the wizard about Graham Potter, the 42-year-old Englishman who, in his maiden stint as a professional coach, has transformed Swedish side Ostersund from off-the-beaten-track no-hopers into European competition giant-killers.

When Potter – latterly employed as a football development officer at the University of Hull and Leeds Metropolitan University – was handed the Ostersund reins in December 2010, the club from central Sweden were in a crumbling state of repair, having recently been relegated to the fourth tier of the domestic pyramid. But delving deep into his bag of motivational tricks, the former Stoke City and West Bromwich Albion full-back would set OFK on course for the most amazing of voyages.

Thanks to back-to-back promotions in his first two seasons, the Jamtkraft Arena became a place where dreams could come true, and by October 2015 the club had secured a first-ever ticket for the top-flight Allsvenskan.

Showing no signs of nerves, Potter's team finished eighth in 2016 and fifth in 2017. Just to underline their coming of age they won their first item of serious silverware last year, beating Norrkoping 4-1 in the Swedish Cup Final.

A few months later, Potter's pupils were again making history, kicking off their inaugural continental campaign with a 3-1 aggregate victory over Galatasaray in the second qualifying round of the Europa League. Winners of the UEFA Cup in 2000, the Turkish side were comprehensively outmanoeuvred by Potter's enterprising ensemble.

Top flight...taking on Hammarby (in green) in the Allsvenskan

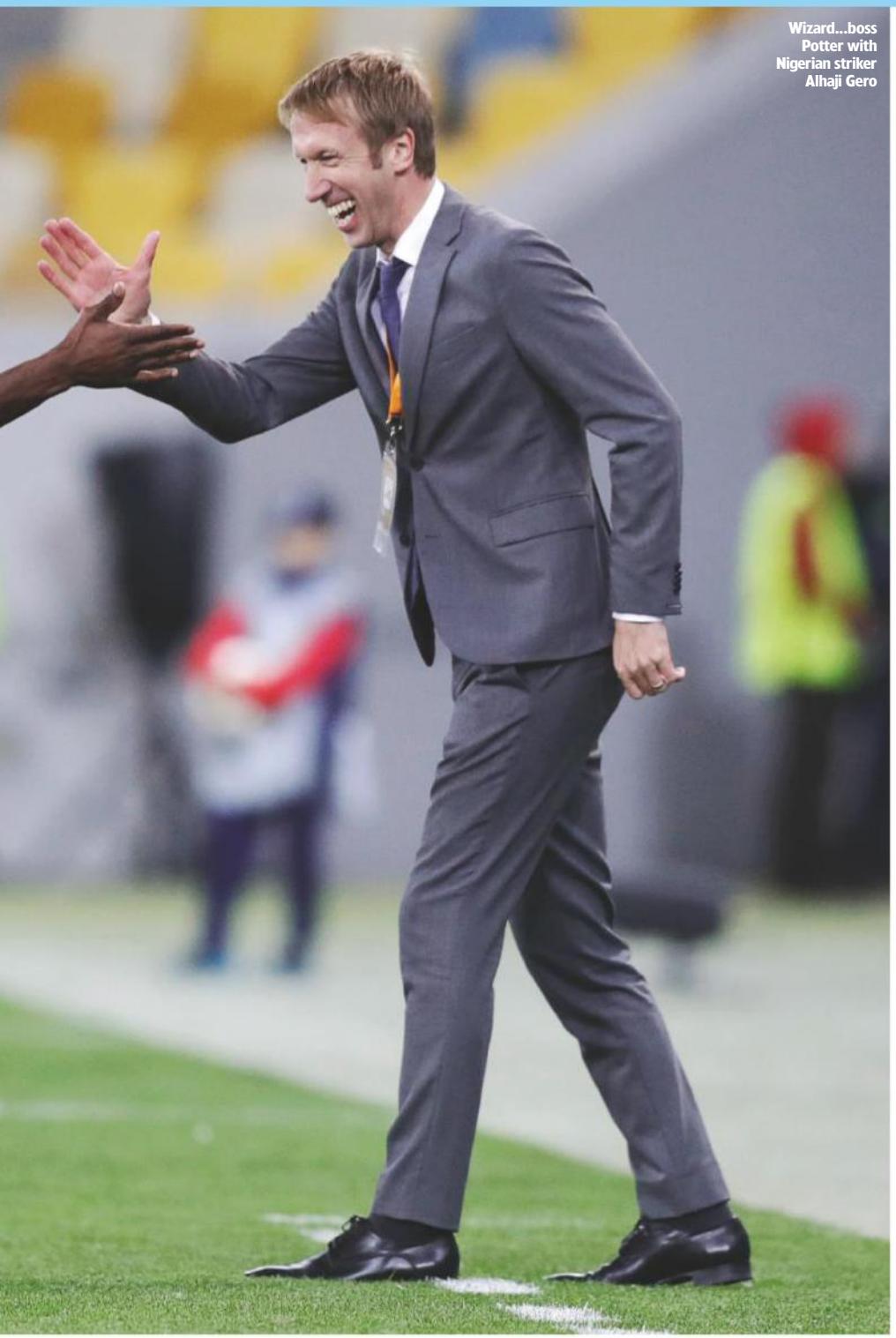
OFK have rarely missed a beat in the Europa League since, knocking out Fola Esch of Luxembourg and Greece's PAOK before breezing through the group phase, losing just once (1-0 at Athletic Bilbao) and beating Gerrmany's Hertha Berlin and Zorya Luhansk of Ukraine.

Founded in 1996 from the fusion of four local sides, the club is seriously punching above its weight. The team has been built on a shoestring, with no player costing more than €100,000, and attendances have risen from a mere 500 back in 2011 to 6,000 today.

"There wasn't a football culture here; we had to develop our own identity as a football club," says Potter, who had been recommended to OFK chairman Daniel Kindberg by former Swansea City assistant boss Graeme Jones, who is now number two to Belgium boss Roberto Martinez. "This was a winter-sports centre which had always produced high quantities of skiers. Now we have boys and girls lining up to attend our football academies and see lots of kids wearing our shirt."

At the helm of a multinational squad which includes Swedish, English, Nigerian, Ghanaian, Iranian and Iraqi talent, Potter has triumphed on so many different levels. He is an astute man-manager, tactically sharp and he leaves nothing to chance in terms of his attention to detail and solid organisation. He also is a master at fostering unity in the squad, regularly resorting to unconventional methods.

Ostersund are intensely proud of what they term their "culture academy", with players trying their hand at arts and crafts in a bid to enhance their self-confidence and performance on the pitch. Every year they have a different theme, tackling such "alien" activities as a performance



Wizard...boss Potter with Nigerian striker Alhaji Gero

> "There wasn't a football culture here; we had to develop our own identity as a football club"
>
> Ostersund coach Graham Potter

of the Swan Lake ballet, the staging of a rock concert or a hip-hop gig, painting, book reading and photography.

"There's a real family atmosphere here and the art projects have helped bond us together," explains Potter.

Although OFK only turn over €5million a year, this lack of financial muscle has not stopped them aiming for the stars.

"Even if I'm taken for the most crazy club president in Europe, I repeat that we will one day play in the Champions League," says Kindberg. And you know he's not joking.

Arsenal had better beware. WS

Increase... OFK fans

ROUND OF 32: 1ST LEG

FEBRUARY 13
Red Star Belgrade v CSKA Moscow

FEBRUARY 14
Astana v Sporting
Marseille v Braga
Ludogorets v Milan
Ostersund v Arsenal
Nice v Lokomotiv Moscow
Real Sociedad v Red Bull Salzburg
Borussia Dortmund v Atalanta
Spartak Moscow v Athletic Bilbao
Copenhagen v Atletico Madrid
AEK Athens v Dynamo Kiev
Celtic v Zenit
Napoli v RB Leipzig
Lyon v Villarreal
Partizan Belgrade v Viktoria Plzen
Steaua v Lazio

ROUND OF 32: 2ND LEG

FEBRUARY 21
CSKA Moscow v Red Star Belgrade

FEBRUARY 22
Lokomotiv Moscow v Nice
Sporting v Astana
Viktoria Plzen v Partizan Belgrade
Lazio v Steaua
Zenit v Celtic
RB Leipzig v Napoli
Villarreal v Lyon
Atletico Madrid v Copenhagen
Dynamo Kiev v AEK Athens
Braga v Marseille
Milan v Ludogorets
Arsenal v Ostersund
Red Bull Salzburg v Real Sociedad
Atalanta v Borussia Dortmund
Athletic Bilbao v Spartak Moscow

ROUND OF 16

MARCH 9
First leg

MARCH 16
Second leg

QUARTER-FINALS

APRIL 5
First leg

APRIL 12
Second leg

SEMI-FINALS

APRIL 26
First leg

MAY 3
Second leg

FINAL

MAY 16 Lyon

Hot shot...Lionel Messi with the ESM Golden Shoe that he won as the top league goalscorer in Europe for 2017

LIONEL MESSI

"Being a father is the most beautiful thing that's happened to me"

The ESM Golden Shoe winner reflects on his life on and off the pitch

What remains of the child who first arrived in Barcelona, aged 13 and full of enthusiasm?
My dreams and desires remain the same. Obviously, a lot of time has passed since then and many things have happened, both on and off the pitch.

How has your family life changed, with the stability of your relationship with Antonella Roccuzzo and the birth of your children?
It's a very big change in every respect. You start to see different things and in a different way. The truth is that being a father is the most beautiful thing that's happened to me in all my life. We have two children and are waiting for another; the first was an incredible feeling, the second the same, and so will be the third.

How is day-to-day life with your children?
My day-to-day life is very much based around the kids. In the morning I take them to school and when I come back from training I practically leave straightaway to pick up Thiago. When he finishes school we try to spend time together with Antonella and Mateo until dinner. We put them to bed and then not much else, spending time amongst ourselves to pass the time – everything that a normal family does.

Do your two boys ask to play football with you at home?
They don't tend to ask me to play football with them. Sometimes they do, even Mateo, who is the youngest. Thiago is already going to training, but they don't often ask me to play.

And when you throw the ball to Mateo, does he throw it back with his right or left hand?
Right. They are both right-handed.

When you get home do you talk football with Antonella and the children, or are you able to leave that at the front door and disconnect completely?
We talk little about football at home. Something very big has to happen at the club or in the national team for it to be a subject at home.

Family...showing off the Spanish Cup last May, with Antonella (who he married in June) and sons Thiago (right) and Mateo

What do your children ask you? Do they understand who Lionel Messi is?
Obviously Mateo doesn't yet. He finds it strange when someone comes and asks for a photo or an autograph. He doesn't understand. Thiago is starting to understand, more or less, but not quite. He likes to go to the stadium and watch games but he doesn't fully understand. Sometimes at home he sees me and calls me "Messi" like the fans do!

What will you do in the future? Do you see yourself as a coach?
I don't know what I'll do. We've spoken several times as a family about how I will occupy my time once my football career is over, but it's not something that is settled. I have always said that I don't see myself as a coach, I don't have a feeling for it. In a few years time that may change, but I still have several years left and then we'll see. When the end is near, something will be done.

A colleague of yours once revealed that you are naturally quite hefty. Is it more the case that you focus on physical workouts or on your diet?
It's nothing special. I have taken care of my diet for years. After training I strengthen my legs but I'm not really one for the gym.

Do you like to cook?
No, I never really have. I would be able to make

something, but I wouldn't market it!

Tell us something that you have cut from your diet that you really liked...
That would be chocolate. That's the most difficult thing for me. Even now, from time to time, I sin with chocolate.

Is taking a siesta still an important part of your routine?
No, not anymore. The truth is that I miss it. When I'm with the national team that's the only chance I take to nap. Now I don't have time because of the kids.

Do you get to watch many matches?
Yes, I like to. I still follow football a lot.

Do you follow any particular competition?
I watch everything in general. Obviously the leagues in Spain, England and Argentina, although my schedule has an impact on that. I follow a little bit of everything.

Is it easy being Lionel Messi?
I'm a normal person who tries to have a family life. Yes, it's true that I'd like to go unnoticed and have a normal life without everyone watching me from time to time.

You have now won the ESM Golden Shoe four times. What do you think when you see those trophies?
It's a beautiful way of recognising what it represents, but I've always said my priority was never individual awards. I would prefer to win another Champions League or La Liga, they are my priorities. But it's beautiful to have these at home because of the meaning they have.

Rivals...with Cristiano Ronaldo

Are Manchester City going to be the team to beat this year?
City are one of the strongest teams at the moment, along with PSG. They've been the two strongest teams up to this point, but it's a very long season. I never dismiss Real Madrid for what they have and their experience, even though now they aren't getting the results people expect. Bayern Munich, too. They're another big team that will be there at the end of the season. But it's true that, today, City and PSG are the best.

Prolific...his 54 goals for club and country in 2017 was bettered only by Harry Kane of England and Tottenham Hotspur

Is your team-mate Samuel Umtiti as scary as he seems in training or is he quieter?
Umtiti trains how he plays – he holds nothing back. Never, neither in games nor training. Off the field he's an excellent person.

Have you been surprised by his performances?
I honestly didn't know much about him when he arrived. Watching him train, it doesn't surprise me what he does in games. I see all his qualities and it no longer surprises me when he does it for real.

Why do you think Barcelona are beating defensive records this season, rather than attacking records?
Neymar's departure has caused the way we play to change. We lost a great deal of offensive potential but it favoured us in a defensive sense. Currently we are most well-armed in the middle of the field. We have more balance and that makes us stronger defensively.

How do you explain the difficulties that Argentina had in qualifying for the World

Final...taking on Germany's Bastian Schweinsteiger

Cup and will you be competitive enough to win the tournament in Russia?
It was a tough period for us. We went through three coaches and it's not easy to adapt to each of them – they all have their own footballing philosophy and ideas. Recently it's been Jorge Sampaoli and we've only played four qualifiers and some friendlies so we will continue on that growth process. Beyond that, the qualifiers were very tough in themselves. Every day, football becomes more even and it's difficult to qualify.

In 2014, you lost the Final to Germany. Will Germany be the favourite again this year or do you see other countries, such as Spain and Portugal, challenging?
Germany will be one of the favourites, as they always are. There are other teams that are also great candidates: Brazil, Spain, France. They are stronger now and have reached the World Cup in good form.

You played Holland in the semi-final in that 2014 tournament. Are you surprised that a great player such as Arjen Robben isn't at the next World Cup?
Today, football is very close and any small nation that is well organised can make life complicated. The Netherlands are missing, as are Italy – teams that have participated in World Cups for decades and nobody expected to fail to qualify.

What's your opinion of Arda Turan, who recently left Barcelona and returned to Turkey on loan to Istanbul Basaksehir?
Arda has a lot of quality, he's an extraordinary player. He had the bad luck of not having the confidence or consistency that any player needs to perform well in a team. He came from Atletico Madrid, where he played in a different position to here. It's not the same to play every now and then compared to playing every weekend, it's much more difficult. When he's played and had continuity in the team, he's done very well."

Four shoes...he has now matched Ronaldo's record

What do you think about Italy's elimination from the World Cup? Do you think Italian football is losing its prominent position in European football?
It's true that Italian football is not the same as in recent years, that's the reality. I don't think it has anything to do with not qualifying for the World Cup. *Calcio*'s great powers such as AC Milan and Inter aren't the same as they were 10 years ago, and that's been felt all across Italian football. Little by little, they are trying to get back on track. Above all, these two teams need to be strong again at a European level.

What do you make of the crisis at Real?
It's only temporary. It's not the first time that we've seen a situation like that of Real Madrid in a top league. In the end, they will be back fighting for everything because of the team they have, because of the players they have and because they have always been like that.

Is Cristiano Ronaldo your only rival for the Ballon d'Or?
There are many great players around today who can win the Ballon d'Or. In recent years there have just been two, but now players like Neymar, Kylian Mbappe and Luis Suarez can compete.

Ronaldo has said that, in the future, you two could be good friends. Is that possible?
I don't know if we will be. Friendship is built through spending time together and getting to know each other. We have no relationship, mainly because we only see each other at awards ceremonies and that's the only time we speak. Everything is fine, but our lives don't cross over very often.

Interview by Juan Ignacio Gallardo/ Luis Fernando Rojo/ESM

Facetoface

SEPP BLATTER

"I have been betrayed"

In one of his first interviews since leaving FIFA, the former president reflects on his time in Zurich

After everything that has happened over the last three years, what was the worst moment of your time in FIFA?
The worst was definitely the 27th of May, 2015 [the day of the arrests], because it was two days before Congress. We were in Switzerland. We had the president of Switzerland with us, as our guest, and nobody told me...but some people already knew about it in FIFA. They knew it – in FIFA!

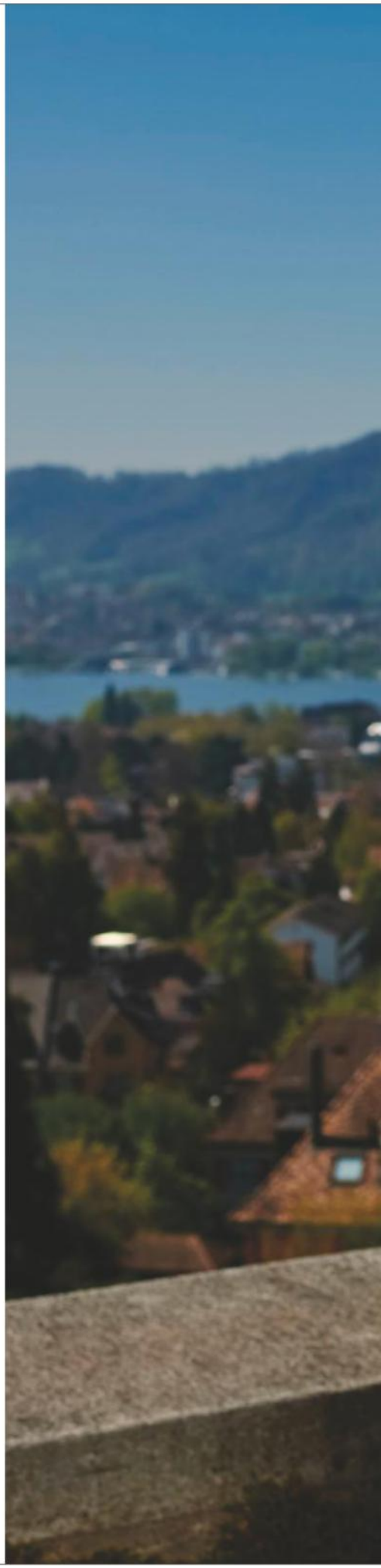
When did you discover what was happening with the arrest of seven football executives at the Baur au Lac hotel?
Only that morning, at six o'clock, when I was listening to the news. But I should have been alerted earlier because when I went to FIFA at seven o'clock, I realised that three of the people there at least knew definitely what was happening. They were already there before me, so they were already in front of events. This is what it was to be betrayed.

You have followed closely December's trial of Jose Maria Marin, Juan Angel Napout and Manuel Bargal in New York. The court heard remarkable evidence about widescale bribery and money-laundering in South American football. Did you ever have any suspicions about what was happening among the leaders of the confederation there?
No...for me it is incredible what has happened. When people ask me what was my biggest error, I say that my biggest error was that I am a trusting man. I gave people my confidence. I trusted all these people and I have been betrayed. Then [after the arrests in Zurich] I didn't have the strength or energy to fight back because I was destroyed. That's why I put my mandate at the disposal of Congress. I could have done something during this time but they suspended me.

During your years at FIFA, were you happier as general-secretary or as president?
In fact, I was in my happiest situation as development officer because my work was to deliver a good message. I was not so happy to be general-secretary because to deal with the particular president at that time [Joao Havelange] was not so easy, but I could manage that. Then I thought it would be easier to be a president, but it was not. For example, after only three years we had the bankruptcy of ISL. That was when we created FIFA Marketing and FIFA-TV.

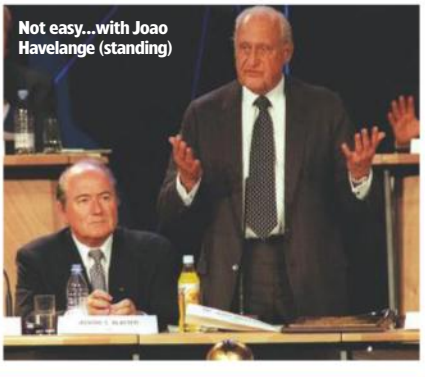
So, looking back over your time at FIFA, what do you consider to have been your greatest achievement?
The best thing in FIFA is that now there are 211 federations, that there is organised football all over the world. You know, 1.6billion people are directly or indirectly involved in the game. They are "followers" of football, as we say in modern terms. There are more than 300million active players, coaches, referees and the rest, and what has been created in all these countries is the possibility for men and women, boys and girls, to play football, which is a school of life – fairplay, respect, and so on. But at the same time we have given to the whole world a broadcasting signal so that all the big matches – the big FIFA matches, anyway – are available everywhere. In this world, the emotion that football is giving through the development programme, through the game itself as everyone can see on television, is achievement number one and I am very proud of that.

How big or small an organisation was FIFA when you started?
When I came to FIFA in 1975 we were 11 "players". I was number 12 and I don't like the number 12 because at that time the number 12 was the substitute. You can just forget it. I was not prepared to be a substitute. I got the ➤



Reflective...Blatter will be 82 in March

title of technical director but I was not the man who made the technical development. I made the booklets, but I had the help of coaches referees, administrators, doctors and educators from the national associations to develop the game. But there was no money. No money! I realised immediately that they wanted to have somebody who is buying and selling. So I was selling. Not bottles of Coca-Cola as they had asked me but I was selling an idea – and the idea was the development of football and to bring the game to the world. I realised this especially at my first big meeting in Africa. It was in February 1976, in Addis Ababa, with the confederation members. I was speaking to them, showing them what we were trying to do and I said we don't want European football here. We are not colonialists. In the end everybody applauded and I realised football is more than just kicking a ball. This, for me, was the kick-off of everything.



Not easy...with Joao Havelange (standing)

> "Africa, especially southern sub-Saharan Africa, it is still made up of very poor countries who need help. There are one or two exceptions, in some parts of South Africa and Nigeria, but only parts, so Africa was, and still is, my baby"

Is this why Africa has always been so special for you?

I love Africa. But if you look at Africa, especially southern sub-Saharan Africa, it is still made up of very poor countries who need help. There are one or two exceptions, in some parts of South Africa and Nigeria, but only parts, so Africa was, and still is, my baby.

How much money did you have to spend on development back then?

Nothing. Practically nothing. All we had was a World Cup every four years with 16 teams. Before I became general-secretary in 1981 the budget for development was the Coca-Cola budget. If I needed books and booklets and other equipment they invoiced me! Then I became general-secretary and I remember very clearly what happened in October 1981. The accountant came to me – at the time we were a bit more than 20 people – and said: "We have no money for salaries. Nothing. Finished." So we had to go to the Swiss bank corporation in Zurich asking for 300,000 Swiss francs to pay the salaries. I went for help to the FIFA president and he said: "We have a president of finance, Artemio Franchi, from Italy, ask him'. And Franchi told me: 'You are the general-secretary. In Italy we say: 'It is not the title, it is what you do with it'. So then I came to the executive committee in January 1982, when we had the World Cup draw in Madrid, and I said: 'Now we have to finish with this development contract – we have to do something else'. Horst Dassler from Adidas had realised that it was wrong because he was a businessman so we started changing things.

FIFA made big financial strides over the next two decades but it was not all plain sailing, was it?

It was certainly not. You know, when I started as president in 1998 we were in the red, but when I was forced to leave FIFA we had made a $338m surplus, we had $1.4m in reserves, $1m in cash and other resources. So this was a good job. The accounts say so.

And then you were suspended...

Yes, I was suspended because not of bribery or corruption or anything like, but I was supposed to have shown an incorrect business attitude!

Interview by Keir Radnedge

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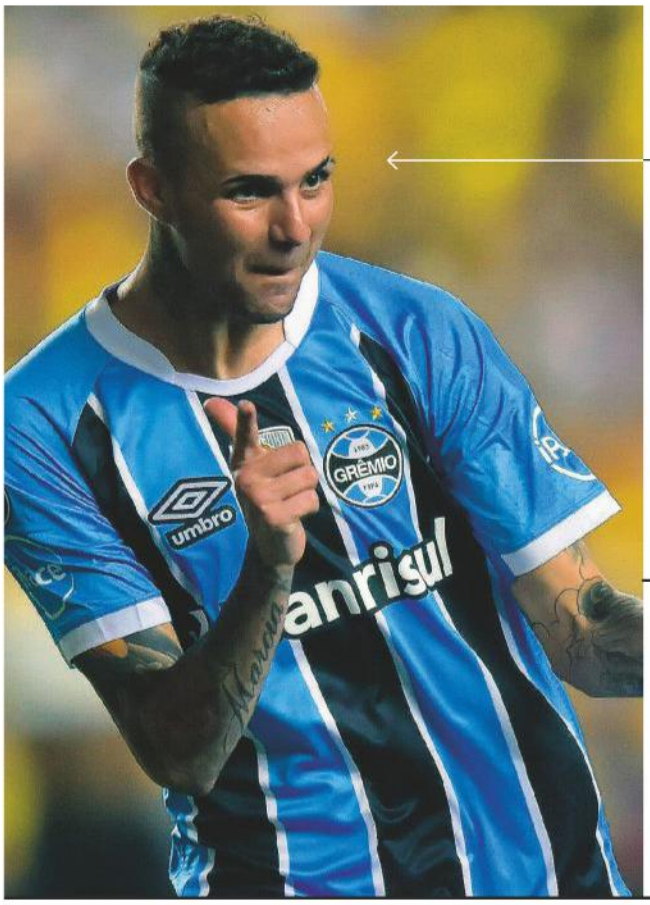
6 of the best Libertadores Cup stars

Tim Vickery looks back at last year's competition



1 LUAN

GREMIO

The outstanding player of the tournament, his delightful chip away to Lanus of Argentina in the second leg of the Final was the goal that made certain of a third Libertadores title for the club from Porto Alegre.

A support striker with intelligent use of space, he drifts elegantly between the opposing lines, both organising moves with his clever passing and ghosting in and around the penalty area to create shooting opportunities for himself.

With Gremio's possession-based game both attractive and effective, he is its attacking fulcrum.

Now 24, he first broke into the side in 2014 but has been guilty of failing to kick on. The potential is obvious and his introduction to Brazil's Olympic team in 2016 helped transform a disjointed side into gold medallists. However, while Libertadores success has put him on the fringes of Brazil's squad for Russia, he made little impression and lots of mistakes at the recent Club World Cup.

2 Ayrton PRECIADO

EMELEC

Ecuador has produced a number of powerful wide men over the years, and last term it was Preciado who came of age, playing four friendlies for the national side and making one World Cup appearance in what was ultimately an unsuccessful qualifying campaign.

After coming through the ranks at Deportivo Quito, he spent time in Portugal, followed by 18 months back home with Aucas before joining Emelec at the start of 2017.

Used on the left wing despite being very right-footed, the 23-year-old has the physical capacity to work the entire line and offers a consistent threat.

He scored the goal that took 2014 Libertadores champions San Lorenzo to penalties in the last 16 and ended the season on a high, with his header clinching the domestic title for his club.

3 Lautaro ACOSTA

LANUS

Having been involved in both of his club's Argentinian league titles – in 2007 and 2016 – the left-winger earned himself another entry in their history books last year.

Needing to score four goals in just over 45 minutes against local giants River Plate in the Libertadores semi-finals, he scored one and set up another two as Lanus reached the Final in their best-ever international campaign.

Now 29, he also scored a last-minute header against Uruguay in the 2007 South American Under-20 Championship to take Lionel Messi and co to the following year's Olympics, where they won gold.

Reunited with Messi in the national side last year, he is quick and elusive, particularly when cutting in onto his right foot.

4 Pedro GEROMEL

GREMIO

Pretty much unknown in his homeland when he joined Gremio in 2014, the team's 32-year-old captain is now generally recognised as Brazil's best home-based central defender and looks to be on the verge of an international call-up.

Having moved to Portugal as a youngster, he made his name in Germany with Cologne, where he was twice named in the Bundesliga team of the season before a loss of form saw him loaned to Mallorca in Spain and then Gremio, where he was soon offered a permanent deal.

Able to turn defence into attack with an accurate long pass or a well-judged surge forward, his fine defensive show against Cristiano Ronaldo and Real Madrid in the Club World Cup may have booked his place in Russia this summer.

5 Jonathan ALVEZ

BARCELONA

Faced time and again with Brazilian opposition in last year's tournament, the champions of Ecuador had a simple set-up: sound defence and quick, counter-attacking wingers who could feed Uruguayan centre-forward Jonathan Alvez.

On target against defending champions Atletico Nacional of Colombia in the opening game, he also found the net in a win against Botafogo in Rio and then against Palmeiras in the last 16.

In the quarter-finals he scored home and away against Santos, including a header in the away leg that put his side in the semi-finals – where he ruined Gremio's 100 per cent home record with the only goal of the game in Porto Alegre.

The only downside was that Barcelona had already lost their home leg 3-0, with Alvez missing after being sent off against Santos. Such excesses of the 29-year-old's temperament have held back a career that blossomed relatively late when he won the Uruguayan title with Danubio in 2014.

With Barcelona failing to qualify for international competition this year, it would be no surprise if he were to move on before long.

6 ARTHUR

GREMIO

In mid-April, with two wins already under their belt, Gremio opted to send a second-string side to Paraguay to face Guarani, and Arthur ran the midfield with such aplomb that it was clear he would not be a reserve for long.

A week later in the return game, he came off the bench after an early injury to Miller Bolanos and slotted in so well that it was already becoming impossible to imagine a Gremio starting line-up without him.

The club are, however, resigned to losing him as a host of European clubs chase his signature.

With a similar stocky build and combination of balance and technique, he has been compared to Andres Iniesta of Barcelona – whose interest was encouraged when the 21-year-old was recently photographed wearing a Barca shirt.

Impact...Salah has been in spectacular form since his £34m transfer from Roma

Barely pausing for breath as he rattles in the goals for Liverpool this season, ace Egyptian front-runner Mohamed Salah was not always quite so clinical. In fact, during his early career at Basle, the media gave him the nickname "*Chancentod*" (chance killer).

As he once told the Basle daily paper *TagesWoche*: "Sometimes I'm on target, sometimes I'm a little unfortunate with my end product. It's a question of concentration."

Not that the FCB hierarchy ever had any intention of giving up on him. Why be too hard on a youngster who was still getting to grips with the game and the lifestyle in Europe, and one who could hurt defences in so many other ways?

As far as his finishing was concerned, Basle had no option but to be patient. High-velocity players do not tend to be the most composed in front of goal and the only remedy was extra sessions on the training ground, where many of his tutorials in the art of finishing were devised by team-mate and former ▸

TRAIL BLAZER

The new African Footballer of the Year is thriving at Liverpool after reviving his career in Serie A

WORDS: Nick Bidwell

Timeline

DEC 25, 2010

Having made his Egyptian Premier League debut for El Mokawloon in May, he scores his first goal in a 1–1 draw with Al Ahly.

OCT 8, 2011

After his first cap for Egypt the previous month, he scores on his second appearance as Niger are beaten 2-0.

MAR 16, 2012

Scores twice for Egypt under-23s in a 4-3 victory against Basle and is invited to train with the Swiss club.

AUG 4, 2012

Having scored in all three group games, he is unable to prevent Egypt exiting the Olympic Games in the quarter-finals.

MAY 2, 2013

Scores twice against Chelsea at Stamford Bridge in the Europa League semi-finals, but Basle lose 5-2 on aggregate.

Switzerland striker Alexander Frei.

Under Frei's tutelage, a more rounded and effective Salah began to emerge. He became cuter in his off-the-ball runs, an improved decision maker and far more likely to stay calm when about to pull the trigger.

His late winner against Chelsea in November 2013 was a typical Salah goalscoring effort. Effortlessly controlling a long ball played out from the back, he turned on the afterburners and then supplied the *coup de grâce* with a subtle left-foot chip inside the far post. A masterclass in rapier-like execution; simple yet ruthless.

"When he arrived at Basle he clearly was a great talent but was very cavalier," says Frei. "There wasn't much in the way of pattern to his play.

"I put on special shooting sessions and it did make him more effective in front of goal. I know he appreciated it.

"What we quickly noticed was his desire to do the necessary work. Every day he was prepared to put in the hard yards before and after training. On the pitch he was a quiet chap, though he was very open to new ideas.

"I'm not surprised that he has since gone on to attain world-class status. He was unbelievably quick and now he has added structure to his attacking game.

"From his time in Italy, with Fiorentina and Roma, he's gained a lot of tactical knowledge. And there's no question that the rapid transition football of Liverpool coach Jurgen Klopp was made for him."

Now 25, Salah first appeared on the Basle radar in 2011 after he played for Egypt at the World Under-20s in Colombia. FCB chief scout Ruedi Zbinden and director of sport Georg Heitz liked what they saw but would not make an offer to Cairo side El Mokawloon. Snap recruitment decisions are not the Basle way as they prefer to do their homework, with in-depth background checks and character analysis.

Surprised that no big European clubs were targeting the player, Zbinden and Heitz continued to monitor Salah closely and by the spring of 2012 they were set to pounce.

Europa League...taking on Tottenham Hotspur

The Egyptian league was shut down at the time following the tragic events in Port Said – where 74 fans, mainly those of Al Ahly, lost their lives when attacked by Al Masry followers – so in a mixture of goodwill gesture and self-interest, FCB invited the Egyptian Olympic squad, including Salah, to Basle for a friendly.

In front of a crowd of 500 at Stadion Rankhof in the city, Salah did not start, but he certainly made an impact when brought on at half-time, scoring twice in his side's 4-3 win.

He stayed on for a week's training with FCB and after a complicated, long-winded set of negotiations, a €2.5million deal was agreed with El Mokawloon.

Although the fee was more than Basle had anticipated, it was to be a fraction of the £11m that Chelsea would shell out for him early in 2014 and the £34m Liverpool paid Roma last summer.

While Newcastle United, Cologne and Espanyol had also shown interest, Salah only had eyes for Basle. "With them I was sure of always competing for the Swiss league and cup, and was excited too by the prospect of achieving my dream of playing in the Champions League," he explained.

"I had a good chance of playing regular first-team football in Basle and just felt good about joining them. During my trial period, the players and coaches went out of their way to make me feel welcome. They treated me really well. I'd have been hard pushed to find a better club."

Renowned for their extensive profiling of new recruits, Basle would have been on intimate terms with every aspect of his back story: his childhood in Basyoun, a small town in northern Egypt; his adolescent reverence for Zinedine Zidane and Brazilian striker Ronaldo; his induction at El Mokawloon at the age of 10 and first-team debut for them six years later; the part he played in Egypt's bronze medal at the 2011 African Under-20 Championship.

What often goes unmentioned is that he was already a full international on signing for FCB, making his bow in a 2-1 defeat in Sierra Leone in an African Nations Cup qualifier in September 2011 and netting four goals in his first seven appearances for his country.

The man who gave him his first chance in the senior squad was caretaker boss Hany Ramzy, who was a key member of Egypt's side at the 1990 World Cup in Italy. "He was a young player with a great deal of impressive qualities," remembers Ramzy. "Not only was he extremely quick over the ground but he also played with

Honour...Africa's best

Threat...in full flight against Burkina Faso in the African Nations Cup semi-finals

JUN 1, 2013
Helps Basle win their fourth consecutive Swiss league title with a 1-0 victory over Thun on the last day of the season.

JUN 9, 2013
Gets a hat-trick in a 4–2 victory in Zimbabwe as Egypt win a fourth consecutive World Cup qualifier.

SEP 18, 2013
Again scores against Chelsea at Stamford Bridge, in a 2-1 win in the Champions League, then gets the only goal in the return a month later.

JAN 26, 2014
Becomes the first Egyptian player to join Chelsea and makes his Premier League debut, against Newcastle United, in February.

MAR 22, 2014
Gets on the scoresheet for the first time in Chelsea colours as they thrash Arsenal 6-0.

intelligence. He had good eyes."

These days, Salah is very much the symbol of Egypt's long-awaited football renaissance. The North African nation had been absent from the World Cup finals since 1990 and gone seven years without featuring in the African Nations Cup. But thanks in no small part to their jet-heeled forward, the clouds have well and truly lifted.

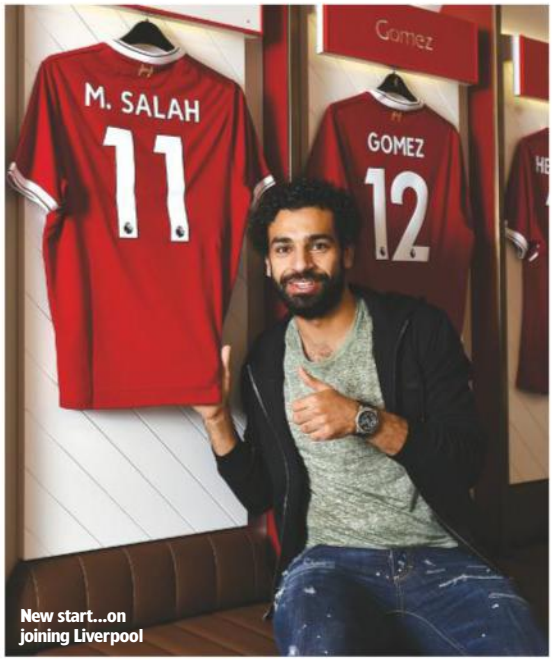
At last year's continental finals, Salah was outstanding as Egypt clinched the runners-up spot behind Cameroon, and he was their top scorer in a successful World Cup 2018 qualification campaign with five goals. His brace in the 2-1 home victory against Congo – including a 95th-minute winner from the penalty spot – sealed their passage to Russia.

It cannot be stressed enough how much Egypt rely on him. Current coach Hector Cuper may be chiefly concerned with tactical austerity and unyielding discipline, but with Salah roaming right, left and centre, the team have a big gun which can go off at any time.

"I knew from an early stage that he was something special," says former Egypt coach Bob Bradley, who was Salah's coach in his early years with the national team. "He had the speed, the explosiveness and an incredible ability to get in behind defences. He was a player who could make a difference. I looked at him as the future of the game in Egypt."

> "He was a player who could make a difference. I looked at him as the future of the game in Egypt"
>
> **Former national coach Bob Bradley on Salah**

Theories abound as to why Salah's ▸



New start...on joining Liverpool

FEB 2, 2015
Joins Italian club Fiorentina on an 18-month loan, which will take him up to the end of the 2015–16 season.

MAR 5, 2015
Gets both goals as Fiorentina win 2–1 away to Juventus in the first leg of an Italian Cup semi-final.

AUG 6, 2015
Having refused to return to Fiorentina, he instead joins Serie A rivals Roma on a season-long loan.

OCT 25, 2015
Scores on his return to the Artemio Franchi stadium as Roma beat Fiorentina 2-1, but is later sent off.

Roman strike... celebrating a goal against Juventus

move to Chelsea in 2014 was an unmitigated disaster in which he rarely started. After just a season-and-a-half of European professionalism at Basle, was he too raw for the English top flight? Was he too lightweight physically? Did the Premier League club really need him?

However, he was resuscitated by the invigorating air of Serie A. On loan at Fiorentina for the second half of the 2014-15 season, he was imaginative all along the front line and a regular goalscorer. They believed they had an option to extend his loan for another year, but Salah wanted a move to a team with stronger Italian title credentials.

The relationship quickly turned ugly and when he failed to turn up for pre-season training in 2015, the Viola lodged a complaint with FIFA. Eventually, Salah got his wish and moved to Roma.

"Salah is an extraordinary player," declared Roma coach Luciano Spalletti. "We've convinced him about the benefits of playing between the lines and now no one knows who should pick him up. His forward breaks are lethal. Markers need a motorbike to catch him."

> "We told him if he didn't pass to a better-placed colleague, he would have to pay for the squad's dinner"
>
> **Former Roma coach Luciano Spalletti**

Spalletti deserves praise for helping Salah to rein in his individualistic instincts. "We told him if he didn't pass to a better-placed colleague, he would have to pay for the squad's dinner, that he would have to go to the cash machine," says Spalletti.

Only the second Egyptian to be voted Africa's Player of the Year – after Mahmoud El Khatib in 1983 – Salah's appeal does not just revolve around his speed, mercurial skills and goals. He also stands for a refreshingly pleasant approach to his craft: the permanent smile, the boyish enthusiasm, the modesty.

His generosity was there for all to see following Egypt's qualification for the World Cup. Offered a luxury villa for his efforts by businessman Mamdouh Abbas, Salah politely declined, instead asking him to make a donation to his hometown.

Running parallel to his humanity and compassion is a cast-iron inner core, an unquenchable ambition.

From the earliest of ages the game was his obsession and nothing was ever going to stand in his way. To attend training at El Mokawloon's academy he endured a daily bus commute of four hours there and four hours back. "As soon as I returned home at night, it was time to go to bed," he recalled.

Inevitably, he has had his share of disappointments – not least his problems at Chelsea, Egypt's failure to qualify for the 2014 World Cup and the fact that early in his career he was ignored by Egyptian big guns Zamalek and Al Ahly – but it says everything about his drive and determination that he simply ploughed on regardless.

Onwards and upwards to the African and European peaks. **WS**

Failure...at Chelsea

NOV 6, 2016
Having made his move to Roma permanent, he scores a hat-trick at the Stadio Olimpico against Bologna.

FEB 5, 2017
On the losing side as Egypt are beaten 2-1 by Cameroon in the Final of the African Nations Cup.

JUN 22, 2017
Agrees to join Liverpool when the transfer window opens on July 1.

AUG 12, 2017
Scores on his Liverpool debut, in a 3-3 draw with Watford and is later voted player of the month by the club's supporters.

OCT 8, 2017
Scores both goals as Egypt beat Congo 2-1 to qualify for their first World Cup finals since 1990.

JAN 14, 2018
On target as Liverpool win 4-3 and inflict a first league defeat of the season on Manchester City.

Mohamed Salah

TRANSFER FEES

El Mokawloon to Basle, Jun 2012	Basle to Chelsea, Jan 2014	Chelsea to Roma, Aug 2016	Roma to Liverpool, Jul 2017

LIVERPOOL'S MOST EXPENSIVE BUYS

- £75m Virgil Van Dijk 2018
- £55m Naby Keita due to join July 2018
- £35m Andy Carroll 2011
- £35m Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain 2017
- £34m Sadio Mane 2016
- £34m Mohamed Salah 2017

On joining Fiorentina on loan in 2015, he chose the number 74 shirt in honour of the victims of the Port Said Stadium riot, in February 2012, in which 74 football fans died.

EGYPT

56 CAPS

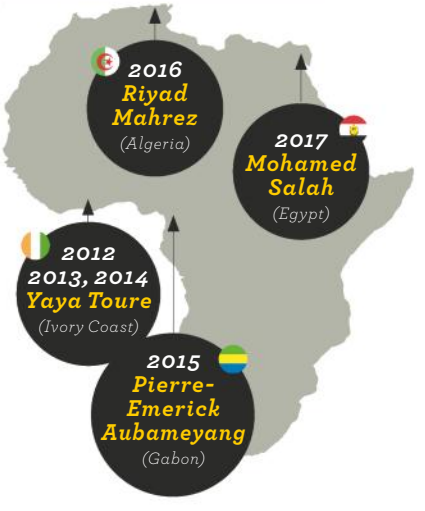
32 GOALS

(*up to & inc 26.01.18)

the numbers game

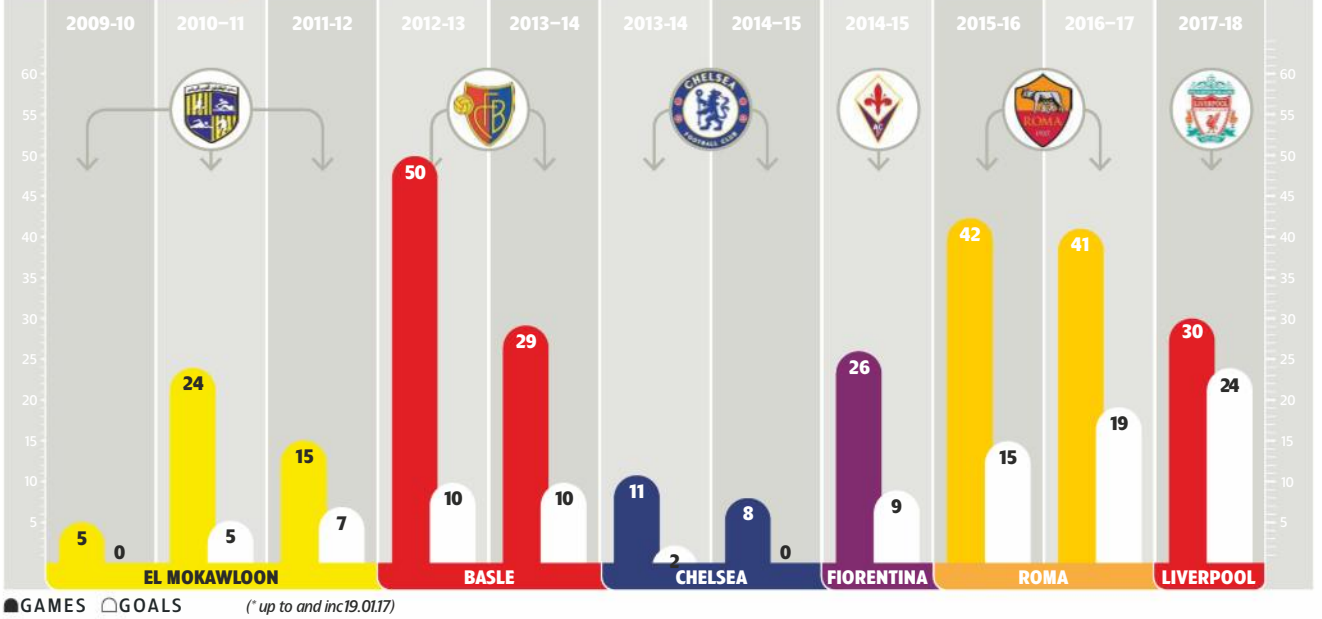
20 Became the first Liverpool player to score 20 goals before Christmas Day since Ian Rush in 1986. Only George Allan, in 1895, reached 20 goals quicker.

CAF PLAYER OF THE YEAR



PREMIER LEAGUE PLAYER OF MONTH

- August — Sadio Mane Liverpool
- September — Harry Kane Tottenham Hotspur
- October — Leroy Sane Manchester City
- November — Mohamed Salah Liverpool
- December — Harry Kane Tottenham Hotspur



GAMES GOALS (* up to and inc19.01.17)

TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

Talentscout

CENTRE-BACKS

WORDS: Nick Bidwell

Benjamin PAVARD

Age 21 (28.03.96), Stuttgart (Ger) & France

In a sentence
Sure-footed defensive rock who has been a Bundesliga revelation and could be a contender for the World Cup after making his debut for *Les Bleus*.

What they say
Stuttgart boss Hannes Wolf: "When he arrived here he didn't have a lot of professional experience but he has gone on to make sensational progress. He has a lot of technical potential, is very decisive in his interventions and has an excellent attitude."

France coach Didier Deschamps: "He's been very consistent at club level and for our under-21s. Picking him was a logical step. Fundamentally he's a central defender, though he can play in other positions."

Julien Delebois, who was head of youth development at his first club, US Jeumont: "Even back then he was a class act. He had an elegant style of play, he had the air of a Laurent Blanc. He was a little taller than the other kids and everybody thought he was much older than he really was. Another thing which struck me about him was his selflessness on the pitch."

3 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT PAVARD

- He was called into Lille's first-team squad after an outstanding display for the reserves against Manchester City under-21s in 2014.
- During his formative years his idol was France midfielder Yohan Cabaye.
- He is not the first French international to have started his career at US Jeumont – former Marseille striker Jean-Pierre Papin also cut his footballing teeth at the club.

The story so far
Born in the northern French town of Maubeuge, he played for Jeumont's junior side – where his father was a coach – before joining top regional club Lille three years later. After successfully switching from a defensive midfield role to centre-back in his late teens, he made his senior Lille bow in 2015 at Nantes. Over the next 18 months he made 25 competitive appearances for *Les Dogues* before somewhat controversially being allowed to leave in 2016, allegedly after falling out with coach Frederic Antonetti. Following a €6million move to Stuttgart he was a 2.Bundesliga champion and continues to shine in the top flight this term. After 15 games for the French under-21s, he earned his first full cap in November.

The next step
Although under contract until 2020, Stuttgart may find it hard to ignore the interest of German big guns Bayern Munich, Borussia Dortmund and RB Leipzig, as well as Serie A side Roma – whose renowned recruitment chief Monchi is said to be an admirer.

> "He's been very consistent at club level and for our under-21s. Picking him was a logical step"
> France coach Didier Deschamps

Strengths
A fine reader of the game, he is stylish and confident when bringing the ball out from the back. Possesses excellent powers of recovery and is a combative, crisp tackler.

Weaknesses
From time to time he can lose focus and fall prey to nonchalance.

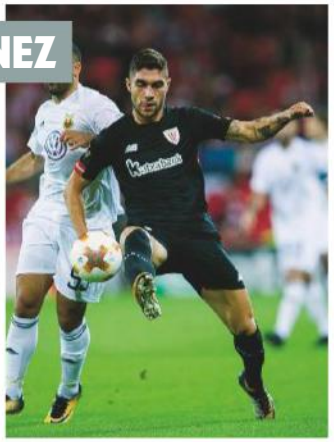
Matthijs DE LIGT

Age 18 (12.08.99), Ajax & Holland
After a nightmare debut for Holland in March – at fault for both goals in a 2-0 World Cup defeat in Bulgaria and hauled off at half-time – he bounced back, earning a runners-up medal in the Europa League. Tipped by the Catalan sports media to be a target for Barcelona.

Thilo KEHRER

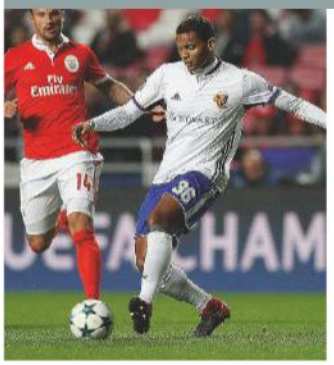
Age 21 (21.09.96), Schalke & Germany
Had a fine 2017, scoring his first Bundesliga goal – in the derby against Borussia Dortmund in April – winning a gold medal with Germany's under-21s at the summer's European Championship and claiming a regular first-team spot at the Veltins-Arena this term.

Unai NUNEZ



Age 20 (30.01.97), Athletic Bilbao & Spain
In his first season as a La Liga first-teamer, but such a revelation that Barcelona reportedly have him on their wish-list. Mature, steady and resolute, Manchester City tried and failed to get him on board a few years ago.

Manuel AKANJI



Age 22 (19.07.95), Basle & Switzerland
On the evidence of his outstanding form for FCB and the *Nati* this season, this son of a Swiss mother and Nigerian father is destined for big things. He won his first cap, against the Faroe Islands, in June and has made a remarkable recovery since snapping cruciate ligaments in his left knee in 2016.

Ricardo FERREIRA

Age 25 (25.11.92), Braga & Portugal
Born in the Canadian province of Ontario to Portuguese immigrants, he owes much of his defensive know-how to spells in Italy with the Milan youth team and Serie B side Empoli. Came to Europe as a 15-year-old, swapping the Toronto academy for Porto's junior ranks, and made his senior international debut in November, in a friendly against the USA.

Cesar MONTES

Age 20 (24.02.97), Monterrey & Mexico
Comfortable when in possession and able to play the ball out from the back, he may not be the quickest but his seemingly telescopic legs make him a marvellous tackler. Made his full debut for Mexico in July, in a Gold Cup tie against Jamaica, and went on to appear in two of his country's World Cup qualifiers.

Duje CALETA-CAR

Age 21 (17.09.96), Red Bull Salzburg (Aut) & Croatia
A ferocious man-marker who is said to be the most intimidating tackler in the Austrian Bundesliga. A regular for his country's under-21 side, he has featured in a number of full *Vatreni* squads but is yet to see any action. Has played in Austria for the last four years, starring for Pasching, Liefering and now Salzburg, who he joined in 2015.

Joris GNAGNON

Age 21 (13.01.97), Rennes (Fra) & Ivory Coast
Uncompromising Paris-born stopper who played for the French under-20s before opting for Ivory Coast, the homeland of his father. In his fourth season at Rennes, he is rumoured to be at odds with coach Sabri Lamouchi and could be heading for the exit.

Glenn Moore

Big two's quarter clash

Barca face defending champions Lyon

Too early? Probably, but Barcelona's pairing with holders Lyon in the quarter-finals of the Champions League will offer an intriguing look at the direction of the female game in Europe.

Lyon have won four Champions League Finals (including the last two), the last nine French titles, pay the biggest salaries and have a squad that would beat most national teams. Barcelona, meanwhile, are still relative newcomers at the top table in the women's game.

Barca have had a women's team since 1970 and there is a section of the Camp Nou museum devoted to it. But with modest backing came matching success, with only the Copa de la Reina in 1994 to show for its first four decades. They were part of the club, but only nominally.

However, since returning to Spain's top flight in 2008 there has been a new impetus behind Barcelona Femeni and they won a quartet of domestic league titles from 2011 to 2015. This provided entry into Europe and the club has now reached the quarter-finals four times, making it to the semis last term. Gates at the team's Mini Estadi home went from 1,000 to 10,000 during that campaign, and that appears to have triggered a fresh desire to raise the status of the women's team.

Neck and neck with defending domestic champions Atletico Madrid, Barca have signed FIFA and UEFA player of the year Lieke Martens of Holland, England's Toni Duggan and French midfielder Elise Bussaglia. Lyon, though, remain a powerful proposition, and their supremacy at home was highlighted in January when they won a French Cup tie at Racing Besancon 20-0 in front of a record home crowd approaching 4,000.

The last time OL lost a two-legged European tie was 2014, to domestic rivals Paris Saint-Germain, but they have gained ample revenge since, beating PSG in the semi-finals the following season and in the Final last year. But the gap may be narrowing. Lyon needed penalties to win the Final and lost 1-0 at home in both the quarter-finals, to Wolfsburg, and semi-finals, to Manchester City, winning both ties by a solitary aggregate goal.

Enthusiastically supported by club owner Jean-Michel Aulas, Lyon brought in US international Morgan Brian during the winter break and re-signed French midfielder Amandine Henry, the latter fresh from winning the NWSL title with Portland Thorns. This followed the summer acquisition of Dutch Euro 2017 winner Shanice Van de Sanden and England defender Lucy Bronze.

Thrashed...Lyon (in black) beat Slavia Prague 9-1 in 2016

However, a squad of internationals is not easy to keep happy and Claire Lavogez departed on loan to Fleury 91 having failed to see much action since recovering from an ankle injury. The 23-year-old French international left with a parting shot at coach Reynald Pedros, claiming: "After my injury I was not given my chance." She added, in a comment many young English male footballers could sympathise with: "There are a lot of foreigners in the big French clubs and we do not trust young French women."

The quarter-finals draw raises the prospect of a repeat of Lyon's semi-final

UEFA Women's ***Champions League***

QUARTER-FINALS

QF1 Montpellier v Chelsea
QF2 Wolfsburg v Slavia Prague
QF3 Manchester City v Linkoping
QF4 Lyon v Barcelona
(Mar 21/22 & 28/29)

SEMI-FINALS

Winner **QF1** v Winner **QF2**
Winner **QF3** v Winner **QF4**
(Apr 21/22 & 28/29)

FINAL: KIEV, MAY 24

Star...Lieke Martens of Barcelona

with Manchester City, though the English club must first beat Linkoping of Sweden. City have brought in Nadia Nadim, the Afghani refugee who leads the line for Denmark, while Linkoping, who have former City midfielder Kosovare Asllani in their ranks, recently secured the Swedish title to ensure their place in next year's Champions League.

The other half of the draw features semi-final debutants Chelsea, and the Spring Series champions have already knocked out Bayern Munich and Rosengard. Coach Emma Hayes said that with the WSL, like most leagues, dominated by a few clubs and with many one-sided games, to succeed in Europe she needed a squad so strong training replicated the competition. Lyon have had this for a while, and now so too do Chelsea, who have 20 internationals from seven countries in their squad. The latest recruits are England cap Anita Asante, who returns to the UK from Rosengard, and Swedish international Jonna Andersson, from Linkoping.

Chelsea will start favourites against Montpellier, another club with a strong Scandinavian contingent, who edged out last year's finalists PSG for the second French slot behind Lyon.

> "There are a lot of foreigners in the big French clubs and we do not trust young French women"
>
> Claire Lavogez

Wolfsburg will be expected to come through the remaining quarter-final against outsiders Slavia Prague. The German champions, who put Chelsea out of the competition in each of the last two seasons, have added USA international Ella Masar, from Rosengard, to their squad. This campaign they have already beaten the champions of Spain and Italy, in Atletico Madrid and Fiorentina respectively.

Slavia were quarter-finalists in 2016 but lost their first leg at Lyon 9-1, and no Czech club has gone beyond the last eight in the Champions League or its forerunner, the UEFA Women's Cup. Indeed, only one eastern European club has reached the final, Zvezda Perm in 2009.

As with the men's competition, which last had a finalist from behind what was the Iron Curtain in 1991, there is no immediate prospect of that situation changing soon.

Indeed, with Swedish clubs finding the financial gap increasingly tough to bridge, and the leading Italian and Spanish clubs beginning to invest, the competition, as with the men, may soon be the sinecure of the big clubs from the big nations of western Europe. WS

New blue... Anita Asante

Round-up

Switch...John Herdman

HERDMAN TAKES MEN'S ROLE

John Herdman, the Englishman who steered Canada's women's team to successive Olympic bronze medals made a shock switch to coach the men's team.

Herdman began in the men's game as a youth coach at Sunderland but later switched to the women's game after his lack of a professional playing career stymied progress in the "show-us-your-caps" mentality of the English men's game.

The Canadian FA backed his move back to the men's game after he became a contender to become England women's coach. Canada moved quickly to replace him, with former Danish coach Kenneth Heiner-Moller taking over.

NEVILLE SHOCK CONTENDER

Former England and Manchester United defender Phil Neville was thrown unexpectedly into the mix as a possible successor to Mark Sampson as England women's coach after Chelsea's Claire Rafferty announced on live BBC Radio he was under consideration.

NEW COACH FOR DANES

Lars Sondergaard replaced Nils Nielsen, who stood down after taking Denmark to the Euro 2017 Final. Sondergaard has had a long career in the men's game in his native Denmark and Austria, most recently at Aalborg BK, but said he was "not afraid to try something new".

Something new...Lars Sondergaard

Return...Fei Wang

BAYERN BOLSTER RANKS

Having been beaten to last season's Frauen Bundesliga title, then knocked out of the Champions League at the last-32 stage, Bayern Munich have been busy strengthening their squad.

Veteran French defender Laura Georges, who has more than 180 caps for her country, joined from Paris Saint-Germain, while promising young English striker Leah Galton signed from US club Sky Blue.

Chinese goalkeeper Fei Wang, who has previous experience in Germany, also arrived in Munich, joining from Dalian Quanjian.

SEAGULLS FLY INTO ELITE

Brighton & Hove Albion, who are now coached by former England boss Hope Powell, have been granted a place in the re-vamped full-time FA Women's Super League, which is set to launch next autumn.

Albion, who are currently in WSL2, will join nine of the current WSL 1 sides, with Sunderland the only club who have not yet chosen to apply. They may, however, do so in March when applications from non-WSL clubs will also be considered, with West Ham United and Crystal Palace expected to be among those applying.

The rest of the current WSL2 clubs have all applied for a place in a new second-tier competition – except for Oxford, who are still considering their options, and Watford, who drop into the amateur regional leagues.

World Soccer vintage 40 years ago

February 1978

Azzurri vet eyes World Cup return

The draw for the forthcoming summer's World Cup finals had taken place and cover stars Italy found themselves in a tough group, alongside hosts Argentina, France and Hungary.

However, *World Soccer*'s Keir Radnedge felt that "a Finals series top heavy with European representation who have in the main been favoured by the draw" meant that there was a very good chance of someone matching Brazil's 1958 feat of winning "the world crown outside their own continent".

In Italy, there was a feeling among some that for the *Azzurri* to manage such an achievement, they might need to recall 34-year-old Gianni Rivera, who had skippered Milan to the top of Serie A that season.

"The 'bring back Rivera' idea came from Walter Mandelli, the Turin industrialist who headed Italy's official World Cup party in Mexico in 1970," reported Radnedge.

One of the features of Italy's 1970 World Cup campaign – in which they had lost 4-1 to Brazil in the Final, was to replace Sandro Mazzola with Rivera at half-time in each game because it was said the pair couldn't play together. Mandelli explained that coach Ferruccio Valcareggi only played Rivera for the last six minutes of that Final due to pressure from the other players.

Asked if he had tried to change Valcareggi's mind during the game against Brazil, Mandelli said: "No, of course not. I was not the manager. I could not interfere. It was nothing to do with me."

But, as Radnedge pointed out, that "didn't stop Mandelli insisting that Rivera's class and skill could be valuable to the *Azzurri* in Argentina".

While Mandelli was adamant in his argument over Rivera's reintroduction to the national side, not everyone was quite so enthusiastic about a recall.

As Radnedge continued: "Not that this was a suggestion which met with the approval of [Giovanni] Trapattoni, trainer of champions Juventus and a Milan team-mate of Rivera in the Sixties.

"Rivera had criticised the *Azzurri*'s recent form, blaming the defeat by England and the poor showing against Luxembourg on the fact that Italy were relying so heavily on the below-form Juventus bloc.

"'How can Gianni say that?' answered Trapattoni. 'I can't remember that he was so good in the World Cup in 1962, 1966, 1970 and 1974.'"

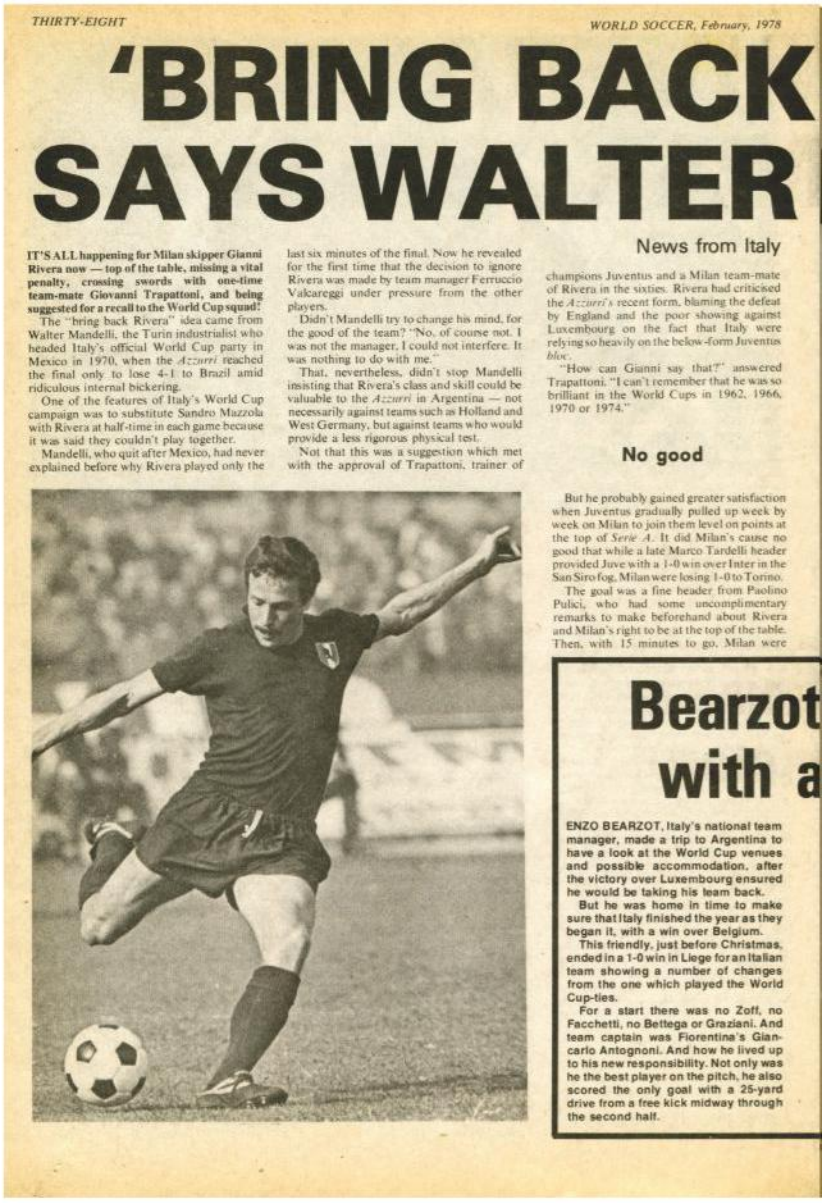
In the end, Italy would travel to the 1978 finals without Rivera and they managed to top their group after beating Argentina 1-0 in Buenos Aires.

However, a 2-1 loss to Holland in the last game of the second-group phase meant that Italy would miss out on the Final, as the hosts went on to beat the Dutch 3-1 in extra-time to claim their first world title. WS

'How can Gianni [Rivera] say that?' answered Trapattoni. 'I can't remember that he was so good in the World Cup in 1962, 1966, 1970 and 1974'

Giovanni Trapattoni on Rivera

Wanted...the call goes out



THIRTY-EIGHT WORLD SOCCER, February, 1978

'BRING BACK SAYS WALTER

News from Italy

IT'S ALL happening for Milan skipper Gianni Rivera now — top of the table, missing a vital penalty, crossing swords with one-time team-mate Giovanni Trapattoni, and being suggested for a recall to the World Cup squad!

The "bring back Rivera" idea came from Walter Mandelli, the Turin industrialist who headed Italy's official World Cup party in Mexico in 1970, when the *Azzurri* reached the final only to lose 4-1 to Brazil amid ridiculous internal bickering.

One of the features of Italy's World Cup campaign was to substitute Sandro Mazzola with Rivera at half-time in each game because it was said they couldn't play together.

Mandelli, who quit after Mexico, had never explained before why Rivera played only the last six minutes of the final. Now he revealed for the first time that the decision to ignore Rivera was made by team manager Ferruccio Valcareggi under pressure from the other players.

Didn't Mandelli try to change his mind, for the good of the team? "No, of course not. I was not the manager, I could not interfere. It was nothing to do with me."

That, nevertheless, didn't stop Mandelli insisting that Rivera's class and skill could be valuable to the *Azzurri* in Argentina — not necessarily against teams such as Holland and West Germany, but against teams who would provide a less rigorous physical test.

Not that this was a suggestion which met with the approval of Trapattoni, trainer of champions Juventus and a Milan team-mate of Rivera in the sixties. Rivera had criticised the *Azzurri's* recent form, blaming the defeat by England and the poor showing against Luxembourg on the fact that Italy were relying so heavily on the below-form Juventus *bloc*.

"How can Gianni say that?" answered Trapattoni. "I can't remember that he was so brilliant in the World Cups in 1962, 1966, 1970 or 1974."

No good

But he probably gained greater satisfaction when Juventus gradually pulled up week by week on Milan to join them level on points at the top of *Serie A*. It did Milan's cause no good that while a late Marco Tardelli header provided Juve with a 1-0 win over Inter in the San Siro fog, Milan were losing 1-0 to Torino.

The goal was a fine header from Paolino Pulici, who had some uncomplimentary remarks to make beforehand about Rivera and Milan's right to be at the top of the table. Then, with 15 minutes to go, Milan were

Bearzot with a

ENZO BEARZOT, Italy's national team manager, made a trip to Argentina to have a look at the World Cup venues and possible accommodation, after the victory over Luxembourg ensured he would be taking his team back.

But he was home in time to make sure that Italy finished the year as they began it, with a win over Belgium.

This friendly, just before Christmas, ended in a 1-0 win in Liege for an Italian team showing a number of changes from the one which played the World Cup-ties.

For a start there was no Zoff, no Facchetti, no Bettega or Graziani. And team captain was Fiorentina's Giancarlo Antognoni. And how he lived up to his new responsibility. Not only was he the best player on the pitch, he also scored the only goal with a 25-yard drive from a free kick midway through the second half.

WORLD SOCCER, February, 1978 — THIRTY-NINE

RIVERA' MANDELLI

by Keir Radnedge

awarded a penalty. Rivera walked up to take it, his fans sure that this would provide at least a point against a Torino who had been forced to go into battle without the injured Castellini, Mozzini, Zaccarelli and suspended Pecci.

Instead reserve goalkeeper Giuliano Terraneo dived to the left to stop Rivera's spot kick. Milan protested that Terraneo had moved — he admitted as much later — but those were protests made in vain and Milan had dropped two valuable points.

That provided Torino some satisfaction after the surprise home defeat by Bastia which put them out of the UEFA Cup. Many Torino fans had come forward before the game to help clear snow off the pitch, and must have considered their heroes' display poor reward.

It was a defeat which means Italy are left with only champions Juventus left in Europe — a state of affairs Helenio Herrera, now earning his money as a journalist, blames on the fact that foreigners are barred.

Yet while Herrera and Juve president Giampiero Boniperti call for the borders to be reopened, league president Franco Carraro is busy fighting off the Common Market attempt to have member countries opening their football to all EEC citizens.

finishes victory!

Later still he shot against a post in a performance which was Italy's most promising for some time.

Roma's Paolo Conti was in goal, with Torino's Patrizio Sala replacing Romeo Benetti in midfield, and elder brother Claudio Sala ousting Juventus' Franco Causio. On top of that Vicenza's Paolo Rossi jumped the centre-forward queue which includes Genoa's Roberto Pruzzo, Perugia's Walter Novellino and Napoli's Beppe Savoldi, to come in for his international debut.

Belgium: Pfaff — Gerets, Meeuws, Renquin, Broos (Baecke half-time) — Vandereycken (Vertautteren h-t), Cools, Coeck — Cluytens, Cordiez (Verheyen 64), Dardenne.

Italy: Paolo Conti — Scirea — Gentile, Manfredonia, Maldera — P. Sala, Tardelli, Antognoni — C. Sala, Rossi, Pulici.

Now Italy face two more friendlies — against France in Naples on February 8, and against Spain in Madrid on February 25.

Herrera's old club, Internazionale, struggle on in mid-table, denying reports that senior adviser Sandro Mazzola will be recalled as a player.

While Inter were drawing 0-0 against Verona, Juventus and Torino were also playing out a scoreless draw — a terrible game with 86 free kicks and which, according to one stop-watch expert, provided only 44 minutes' actual football.

Milan, however, failed to take advantage, against Perugia. Indeed they were 2-0 down early on, and it was only thanks to a Rivera penalty shortly before the end that they salvaged a point.

The following week saw Torino-Milan and Inter-Juventus. And the fact that it was Tardelli who won the game for Juve underlines their problem in attack. Of 21 goals so far, four have been own goals, and top scorer, Roberto Boninsegna, has scored just four times — one of those a penalty.

No wonder Juve are casting envious eyes on Kevin Keegan and Klaus Fischer.

Promotion

However the answer may already be partly in their hands. He's 21-year-old Paolo Rossi, the young centre forward who exploded last season in the second division, brought Lanerossi Vicenza promotion, and has now taken them to within a point of the leaders.

Rossi was a Juventus youth player, and they still own a half-share in him, which they may well try to realise at the season's end. Rossi has scored 11 goals, which puts him equal top of the charts with Beppe Savoldi, who did his own reputation no harm with four goals in Napoli's 5-0 hammering of struggling Foggia.

Not that Juve are the only team with attacking problems. That much was illustrated one horrific week when the eight *Serie A* games produced a mere *nine* goals, and (would you believe?) seven draws!

Even Milan coach Nils Liedholm says: "If I could have Graziani from Torino, I could guarantee us the title," as his team continue relying for goals on full back Aldo Maldera.

At the bottom of the table, it looks grim for Fiorentina, and even worse for Bologna. With three teams to go down Bologna are bottom with five points, Pescara have seven, Fiorentina eight and Foggia 10.

Already two of those teams have changed their trainers, Bologna recalling Bruno Pesaola after just a few weeks, and now Fiorentina have ended the three-year reign of Carlo Mazzone.

Mazzone's departure followed a 1-0 home defeat by a Lazio team so mixed-up in morale that they had gone on strike for 24 hours earlier in the week in protest at a delay in paying bonuses they had been due for months.

As usual in these cases Mazzone had only a couple of weeks before being given a vote of confidence by the directors. But then, president Ugolino Ugolini had resigned himself a few weeks before. Mazzone's successor, for the time being and just to confuse matters, is named Mario Mazzoni — and he was Mazzone's assistant.

No wonder Fiorentina are all mixed up!

At least Mazzoni's takeover saw their first home win of the season, 1-0 against Napoli. And there was further good news with the return to fitness of international full back Moreno Roggi, who has been out of action for 16 months with a broken leg.

Meanwhile there has been one more change of trainer — this time in the second division. Luis Suarez, former Spanish international and midfield general of Inter in the mid-sixties, has taken over struggling Como. He's the fourth new man to take over in the second division since the season began.

Also in this issue...

p6-7
Borussia Monchengladbach's Allan Simonsen becomes the first Dane to win the European Footballer of the Year award. But Keir Radnedge believed there was a "lack of one truly outstanding player making his mark on the year". He also thought that Simonsen "stole" past runner-up Kevin Keegan and third-place Michel Platini "more because of their shortcomings...than on his own ability".

p15
Brian Glanville felt that "Ron Greenwood was not an inspired choice as England's new manager" and argued that "I think the whole idea of a permanent team manager is nonsense". Glanville suggested that in the future we would "see a more flexible system than we have ever had before".

p40-41
A focus on Club Brugge tells how the team were founded by English students and are now one of the best sides in Europe, having reached the UEFA Cup Final in 1976. National champions for the past two years, last season they became only the second club to complete the Belgian league-and-cup double, after great rivals Anderlecht.

p43
Germany's Sepp Maier may have been one of the world's best goalkeepers, but he was also a renowned prankster and practical joker. Poking fun at himself, the 33-year-old reveals: "There are always two zanies on a football team: the left wing and the goalie."

10 years ago
The Football Association of Ireland announce that the former Italy and Juventus coach Giovanni Trapattoni (below, centre) will take up the position of manager of the Republic of Ireland in May.

20 years ago
Burkina Faso host the African Nations Cup – Congo DR (in blue) against Ghana, below – for the first time in their history. The tournament is won by Egypt, who beat South Africa 2-0 in the Final with goals from Ahmed Hassan and Tarek Mostafa.

30 years ago
Wales part company with Mike England six months before his contract expires and Brian Clough says he'd like to combine the job with his current role as manager of Nottingham Forest. His club, however, refuse to allow him to take on both jobs.

40 years ago
Second Division minnows Orient beat Chelsea in an FA Cup fifth-round replay at Stamford Bridge. The east London side will make it all the way to the semi-finals, where they eventually lose to Arsenal.

50 years ago
Borussia Dortmund winger Lothar Emmerich scores during his side's 5-0 thrashing of Karlsruher and becomes the first player to score 100 goals in the Bundesliga. He would finally retire with a total haul of 115 in 183 games.

MISCELLANEOUS

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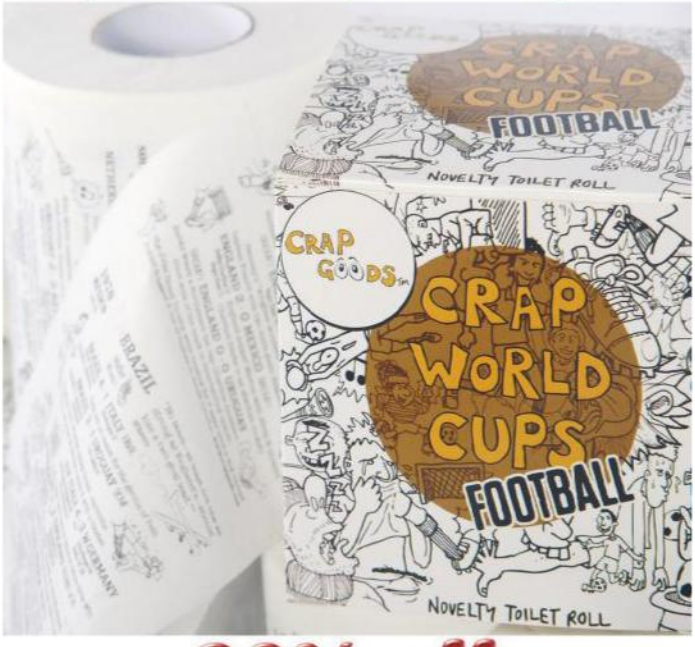

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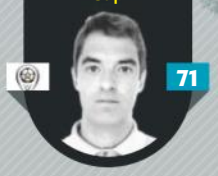

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Hot shot...Lazio's Ciro Immobile

SOUTH AMERICA LEAGUES

	HOW THE LEAGUE WAS WON	CONTINENTAL QUALIFIERS	PLAYER OF THE YEAR
Bolivia LFPB CLAUSURA	Bolivar won their 27th league title, claiming the Clausura in the second half of the year, finishing four points clear of The Strongest. But Spanish coach Benoit San Jose has now joined Universidad Catolica of Chile and is replaced by a Brazilian, Vinicius Eutropio.	**LIBERTADORES:** Bolivar, The Strongest, Jorge Wilstermann, Oriente Petrolero. **SUDAMERICANA:** Blooming, Guabira, San Jose, National Potosi.	**Juan Carlos ARCE** *(Bolivar)* Clever and versatile support striker or attacking midfielder who was the class act of the campaign.
Chile PRIMERA	The transition tournament winners were Colo Colo, who finished two and three points ahead of Union Espanola and Universidad de Chile respectively. Santiago Wanderers won the cup to qualify for the Libertadores, but were relegated at the end of the season.	**LIBERTADORES:** Universidad de Chile, Colo Colo, Santiago Wanderers, Universidad de Concepcion. **SUDAMERICANA:** Union Espanola, Everton, Audax Italiano, Deportes Temuco.	**Jaime VALDES** *(Colo Colo)* Veteran midfielder who continually takes the right decisions in possession and who still carries a threat to the opposing goal.
Colombia PRIMERA A: TORNEO FINALIZACION	The play-off system boiled down to a two-legged Final between old Bogota rivals, in which Millonarios beat Santa Fe 3-2 on aggregate. The Apertura, played in the first half of the year, was won by Atletico Nacional.	**LIBERTADORES:** Atletico Nacional, Millonarios, Santa Fe, Junior. **COPA SUDAMERICANA:** Independiente Medellin, America, Deportivo Cali, Jaguares.	**Yimmy CHARA** *(Junior)* The squat, strong support striker was joint-top scorer and combined well with Teo Gutierrez, hauling himself into contention for the national team.
Ecuador SERIE A: SECOND STAGE	Emelec were crowned champions for a 14th time, winning home and away in the play-off against First Stage winners Delfin, a small club who were recently in the third tier.	**LIBERTADORES:** Emelec, Delfin, Independiente del Valle, Macara. **SUDAMERICANA:** Barcelona, El Nacional, Deportivo, Cuenca, LDU.	**Ayrton PRECIADO** *(Emelec)* An outstanding year for the latest quick, dynamic winger to roll off the Ecuadorian production line
Paraguay PRIMERA: CLAUSURA	Cerro Porteno hit top spot after 15 rounds of the Clausura and held on to win by a three-point margin from Olimpia. In the Apertura, played in the first half of the year, Libertad finished ahead of second-place Guarani.	**LIBERTADORES:** Libertad, Cerro Porteno, Guarani, Olimpia. **SUDAMERICANA:** Sol de America, General Diaz, Sportivo Luqueno, Nacional.	**Rodrigo ROJAS** *(Cerro Porteno)* Captain of the champions and a central midfielder who specialises in making well-timed attacking breaks forward.
Peru PRIMERA: CLAUSURA	Apertura winners over Real Garcilaso on goal difference, Alianza Lima won the Clausura from the same opponents by a two-point margin, meaning there was no need for a play-off Final.	**LIBERTADORES:** Alianza Lima, Real Garcilaso, Melgar, Universitario. **SUDAMERICANA:** UT Cajamarca, Sport Huancayo, Sport Rosario, Sporting Cristal.	**Luis AGUIAR** *(Alianza Lima)* Competitive and classy Uruguayan midfielder who was the top scorer for the champions and who will be badly missed now that he has moved back to Uruguay.
Uruguay PRIMERA: CLAUSURA	Penarol won the Clausura and went on to become league champions for the 51st time at the end of a convoluted, multi-stage format. Defensor triumphed in the Apertura, while Nacional won the Intermedio tournament.	**LIBERTADORES:** Penarol, Defensor, Nacional, Wanderers. **SUDAMERICANA:** Cerro, Boston River, Rampla Juniors, Danubio.	**Cristian RODRIGUEZ** *(Penarol)* Veteran attacking midfielder whose touch of left-footed class tipped the balance in favour of his side.
Venezuela PRIMERA: CLAUSURA	Apertura champions Monagas won their first title, beating Deportivo Lara, who won the Clausura, 2-0 away in the second leg to win 2-1 on aggregate.	**LIBERTADORES:** Monagas, Deportivo Lara, Carabobo, Deportivo Tachira. **SUDAMERICANA:** Minero, Zamora, Caracas, Estudiantes de Merida.	**Anthony BLONDELL** *(Monagas)* Rangy striker who was the competition's top scorer by some distance and the focal point of the champion's attack. Now heading to MLS.

COACH OF THE YEAR		REVELATION OF THE YEAR	2018
Victor Hugo ANTELO *(Guabira)* Former striker who did a fine job with a newly-promoted side, steering them to mid-table and Sudamericana qualification.	Class...Juan Carlos Arce	**Ruben CORDANO** (Blooming) Teenage goalkeeper who is seen as a future hope for the national team and blooded successfully in the top flight.	Last season saw a transition to a new format, with the season now being played on a calendar-year basis, with the new Primera Division extended by two to 14. The Apertura will feature play-offs, while the Clausura, will be played on a league basis.
Martin PALERMO *(Union Espanola)* Just missed out on a Libertadores place in a disappointing end to the season, but the ex-Argentina striker kept his team in contention throughout the campaign.	Vet... Jaime Valdes	**Pablo ARANGUIZ** *(Union Espanola)* Talented all-round midfielder who made a big impression and is now on his way to the United States.	Reversing a move made five years ago, the season will revert to following the calendar year, with the short-tournament format being replaced by a long league featuring 16 teams.
Luis Fernando SUAREZ *(La Equidad)* Did a solid job with a small club who pushed Millonarios all the way in the quarter-finals.	Champs... Millonarios	**Yairo MORENO** *(Envigado)* Breakthrough year for a lithe, left-footed attacking midfielder with talent and goal power.	The same format is retained, with two separate championships: the Apertura and Finalizacion. Twenty teams will play each other once in a league format, with the top eight qualifying for the play-offs.
Alfredo ARIAS *(Emelec)* The Uruguayan who has done an impressive job building a title-winning side. Now can he make a real impact on the Libertadores?	Success... Emelec	**Billy ARCE** (*Independiente del Valle)* Exciting teenage attacking midfielder from a club that specialises in youth development. Moves well, strong on the ball and has good vision.	The league will retain the current format, with 12 teams playing in two separate home and away league stages, with the winners of the two phases meeting in a two-legged Final to define the overall champion.
Fernando JUBERO *(Libertad)* Spaniard who has constructed an interesting body of work in Paraguay. Won the Apertura and came close to taking the side to the Final of the Sudamericana.	Move...Alfio Oviedo	**Alfio OVIEDO** *(Cerro Porteno)* Breakout season for a striker who enjoyed a good Apertura for Independiente Campo Grande and then stepped up with the champions in the Clausura.	The same format is retained, with a 12-team league, playing two separate home and away league championships.
Pablo BENGOCHEA *(Alianza Lima)* Former Uruguayan playmaker who enjoyed a memorable debut season in Peru.	Debut...Pablo Bengochea	**Roberto SIUCHO** *(Universitario)* The 20-year-old attacking midfielder with a fine left foot held together a club in financial crisis.	Although still to be confirmed, it seems that 16 teams will take part in another four-stage format: Summer, Apertura, Clausura and overall Final. However, there is pressure to reduce fixtures to help the national team prepare for the World Cup.
Eduardo ACEVEDO *(Defensor)* Experienced coach and former international defender who, is doing a fine job grooming the club's next generation of promising youngsters	Champions... Penarol	**Ayrton COUGO** *(Defensor)* The son of a Brazilian, he is a strong, quick left-footer who can operate at full-back or in midfield.	The 16 teams play each other once in the Apertura and the Clausura, with the Intermedio taking place between the two championships. The Apertura and Clausura winners meet to decide who plays the team with the most points over the whole season.
Leonardo GONZALEZ *(Deportivo Lara)* Former international defender who did a solid job in difficult circumstances. Took over in mid-2016 with the club threatened with relegation.	Solid... Leonardo Gonzalez	**Jose HERNANDEZ** *(Caracas)* One of the heroes of Venezuela's 2017 Under-20 side, the left-back ended an impressive season with a move to MLS.	The 18 teams meet once in both the Apertura and the Clausura. After each tournament, the top eight move into the play-offs, with the two winners meeting for the overall title.

Compiled by Tim Vickery

DECEMBER 11, 2017-JANUARY 17, 2018

Global diary

A comprehensive record of recent events around the world

Monday December 11

SUDAN: Croatian coach Zdravko Logarusic is put in charge of the national side for the African Nations Championship in Morocco, which starts in January, after which his position will be reviewed.
UEFA: The draw for the Champions League last 16 pairs holders Real Madrid with Paris Saint-Germain, while Chelsea face Barcelona.

Tuesday December 12

COLOMBIA: Edwin Cardona, who made a discriminatory gesture with his eyes toward a South Korean opponent in a November friendly, is suspended for five games. The ban means the midfielder will still be available for Colombia's opening World Cup game on June 19.
FRANCE: Lille are banned from signing players in the January transfer window.
GERMANY: Borussia Dortmund win 2-0 at Mainz – their first success in the Bundesliga since September – in coach Peter Stoger's first game.
ITALY: Internazionale require penalties to see off third-tier Pordenone in the Italian Cup following a goalless draw.
NIGERIA: Despite being docked two points for fielding an ineligible player in a 1-1 qualifying draw with Algeria, Nigeria's place at the World Cup is unaffected. Shehu Abdullahi should have been serving a ban for accumulated yellow cards.

Wednesday December 13

ARGENTINA: Independiente draw 1-1 in Brazil with Flamengo to win the Sudamericana Cup, triumphing 3-2 on aggregate.
LAOS: Lao Toyota are banned from the 2018 AFC Cup after they are found guilty of match manipulation during the 2015 and 2016 editions of the competition.
SPAIN: Cristiano Ronaldo scores in Real Madrid's 2-1 victory over Al Jazira of the UAE to become the all-time top goalscorer in the Club World Cup with six.

Thursday December 14

ENGLAND: Cricket legend Ian Botham is named president of third-tier side Scunthorpe United, for whom he made 11 appearances between 1980 and 1985.
FRANCE: The Ligue de Football Professionnel announces that video assistant referees will be used in Ligue 1 from next season.
SPAIN: Although he led Lanus of Argentina to the Libertadores Cup Final, Jorge Almiron is barred from becoming Las Palmas' new boss as he does not have the five years of European coaching experience required by the Spanish federation.

Friday December 15

BRAZIL: FIFA ban CBF president Marco Polo del Nero "from all football activities at both national and international level" for 90 days while he is under investigation over possible unethical conduct.
FRANCE: Lille terminate the contract of coach Marcelo Bielsa after just seven months in charge.
ITALY: The presidents of Serie B sides Foggia and Venezia are reportedly involved in a brawl during a game in which hosts Foggia score twice in the last three minutes to force a 2-2 draw.

Saturday December 16

MALAWI: Be Forward Wanderers beat Masters Security 4-1 and win the league title for the first time in 11 years with a game to spare.
PHILIPPINES: Ceres Negros beat Global Cebu 4-1 in the Final to win the Philippines Football League.
SOUTH KOREA: A 4-1 victory over Japan in the Final sees South Korea retain the EAFF E-1 Championship.
SPAIN: Club captain Sergio Ramos lifts his fifth trophy of 2017 as Real Madrid beat Gremio 1-0 in the Club World Cup Final.

Sunday December 17

BELGIUM: League leaders Club Brugge beat defending champions Anderlecht 5-0.
COLOMBIA: Millonarios win their 15th league title, drawing 2-2 with Santa Fe to win the Clausura Final 3-2 on aggregate.
ECUADOR: Emelec are crowned national champions with a 6-2 aggregate victory over Delfin.
EL SALVADOR: Alianza complete an unbeaten Apertura campaign with a 4-1 victory over Santa Tecla

Derby-day thrashing...Feyenoord (in green) launch an attack on their way to a 7-0 romp away at city rivals Sparta Rotterdam

Double...South Korea's Kim Shin-wook (in white) scored twice in the EAFF E-1 Championship Final

in the Final.
HOLLAND: Feyenoord win 7-0 away to city rivals Sparta Rotterdam.
KENYA: Patrick Matasi saves three spot-kicks as hosts Kenya beat Zanzibar on penalties to win the CECAFA Cup following a 2-2 draw after extra time in the Final.
SCOTLAND: Celtic's British record run of 69 domestic games without loss ends with a 4-0 defeat away at Hearts. The reverse is their first in 57 league matches.
VENEZUELA: Having lost the first leg 1-0, Monagas beat Deportivo Lara 2-0 in the return to win the Serie Final.

Monday December 18

ECUADOR: Independiente del Valle striker Jose Angulo is banned for four years, backdated to July 2016, after he tests positive for cocaine.
ENGLAND: Crystal Palace midfielder Jason Puncheon is charged with carrying a weapon after a fight outside a nightclub ➤

Celtic beaten...Hearts' Kyle Lafferty

South America

TIM VICKERY

Independiente win Sudamericana Cup

Argentinian side topple Flamengo in Final

The 16th and most glamorous edition so far of the Sudamericana Cup culminated in a tight struggle between two of the continent's giants, with Independiente of Argentina winning 3-2 on aggregate against Flamengo of Brazil.

Flamengo were one of 10 teams who made their way into the competition after being knocked out of the Libertadores Cup – in an initiative borrowed from the UEFA Champions League – as the two South American club competitions were played over the entire year for the first time.

Initially, the new calendar did the secondary tournament few favours. With no group phase, the Sudamericana is now a straight home-and-away knockout competition from start to finish, so it was difficult to build up any momentum. In the opening round there were gaps as long as three months between the two legs.

Although there was a strong showing from Ecuadorian and Colombian teams in the early phase, by the quarter-finals Junior of Colombia were alone among two Paraguayan, two Argentinian and three Brazilian sides.

Both semi-finals were hard fought, with Flamengo digging deep to get past Junior and Independiente making it past Libertad of Paraguay to set up a showdown between the two heavyweights.

Perhaps the key figure in the two-legged Final was Flamengo's captain, the gangling centre-back Rever. With the Argentinians struggling to cope with his power in the air from set-pieces, he headed the visitors into the lead in the first leg in Avellaneda.

The flip side of Rever's game, however, is a lack of mobility and he can look awful when caught in open space. Alongside the veteran former international Juan, he tends to drop very deep, which invites pressure. As a result, Flamengo lost all their away matches in the Libertadores – and that's what happened again in the Sudamericana Final.

As Flamengo dropped back, Independiente found space to pick up momentum and put into practice a passing game that has been skilfully introduced by coach Ariel Holan. With a background in field hockey, he is full of bright ideas and his team display an interesting flexibility, with a rotation of positions behind centre-forward Emmanuel Gigliotti.

Martin Benitez set up Gigliotti for the equaliser just before the half-hour mark, and then 18-year-old playmaker Ezequiel Barco set up Maximiliano Meza to volley home a second-half winner.

A week later, in the Maracana, a similar pattern of play emerged, although Independiente sacrificed much of their fluidity in a bid to halt Flamengo down the flanks.

Flamengo levelled the aggregate scores, once again from a set-piece, with Juan and Rever both getting a touch before Lucas Paqueta forced the ball over the line. But 10 minutes later the hosts lost the ball in midfield, retreated too far and then gave Independiente a somewhat soft penalty as Gustavo Cuellar clipped Meza. With astonishing maturity, the teenager Barco stepped up to fire home from the spot.

Sudamericana champions... Independiente celebrate

Barco went on to dominate the second half of the game – leading the charge on the counter-attack – and, after some exaggerated time wasting, Independiente lifted their first major international title since the 2010 Sudamericana.

A number of Flamengo fans had forced their way into the stadium before the kick-off and some rioted after the game – leaving a trail of destruction inside the Maracana that could see the club punished ahead of the 2018 Libertadores. WS

➤ in the early hours of Sunday.
ITALY: A one-year ban imposed on Juventus chairman Andrea Agnelli in September for an alleged ticketing scandal is overturned by the Italian Football Federation but his fine is increased to €100,000.
TURKEY: Galatasaray sack coach Igor Tudor after a 2-1 defeat at Yeni Malatyaspor on Sunday saw them lose top spot in the league.

Tuesday December 19

GERMANY: Werder Bremen say Florian Kohfeldt will remain as coach "for the foreseeable future" after leading the team to three wins and three draws in seven Bundesliga games as caretaker.

Wednesday December 20

ENGLAND: Bristol City beat holders Manchester United 2-1 in the League Cup and face Manchester City in the semi-finals. The winners will meet Arsenal or Chelsea in the Final. Swansea City sack manager Paul Clement.
FRANCE: Saint-Etienne announce Jean-Louis Gasset as their new coach half an hour before kick-off as they lose 2-1 to Guingamp.
GERMANY: Bayern Munich beat holders Borussia Dortmund 2-1 in the German Cup.
PERU: Paolo Guerrero has his one-year suspension for failing a drugs test reduced to six months, which means that he will now be eligible to play in the World Cup.
USA: Nashville is awarded an expansion team by MLS and will become the league's 24th side.

Thursday December 21

HOLLAND: Ajax sack coach Marcel Keizer and his assistant Dennis Bergkamp, with Michael Reiziger taking interim control.
LIBYA: Omar Al Maryami is named national coach after negotiations with former Egypt international Hany Ramzy fall through.
TURKEY: Out of work since July, when he left his role as national coach following an altercation with a restaurant owner, Fatih Terim takes charge of Galatasaray.

Friday December 22

SPAIN: Atletico Madrid lose in La Liga for the first time this season, going down 1-0 at Espanyol. Sevilla sack coach Eduardo Berizzo a week after he returns from cancer surgery.

Saturday December 23

COSTA RICA: Perez Zeledon win their first national title, beating Herediano 1-0 on aggregate to ➤

Jersey

STEVE MENARY

UEFA bid doomed to failure

February's Congress in Bratislava set to deny JFA

Jersey's attempt to join UEFA at this year's Congress in Bratislava looks increasingly futile.

At the end of last year, the Jersey Football Association (JFA) launched a bid for UEFA membership and, after a legal tussle that ended up in the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) and cost the JFA €36,000, an application will finally be heard at UEFA's Congress on February 26.

"After we submitted our bid to UEFA we got no reply for nine months, then were told it was rejected without even going to a vote," says JFA president Phil Austin. But after CAS' ruling that the bid must be heard by Congress, Jersey were left with less than six months to prepare for Bratislava. In contrast, Gibraltar had 18 months before the vote on their application in 2013.

New UEFA membership criteria means applicants must be recognised as an independent country so Austin holds out little hope of getting a single vote, partly due to what he says is the antagonistic attitude of UEFA's legal director Alasdair Bell.

"The disappointing thing is the way we have been treated, not the outcome," says Austin, who does not want to enter the European Championship but is seeking a place in the bottom division of UEFA's new Nations League.

With Brett Pitman at Portsmouth, Coventry City's Peter Vincenti and Kurtis Guthrie of Colchester United all eligible, Austin is confident Jersey could compete.

He adds: "We've been saying for a while 'tier it', but the [English] FA said to us it's all about money.

"There's 55 members in the UEFA club and they don't want to share that money."

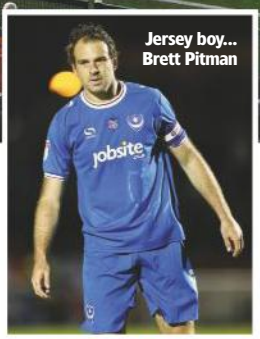
Generating interest...most supporters realise that change is needed on the island

For most, getting a professional contract while playing in Jersey is hard, but last summer Cav Miley signed for Eastleigh in England's fifth tier, the National League.

"There wasn't a huge lot of competition as a kid," says Miley. "You know who you're playing week in week out. That goes right up to senior level. There's not a lot to look forward to."

Neighbours Guernsey joined the English pyramid in 2011 but they are stuck at level eight, and with their best players gone the move decimated Guernsey's Priaulx League. The annual match between

Losing...Jersey take on Kent



Jersey boy... Brett Pitman

the Priaulx League winners and Jersey's champions is now a very one-sided affair and few on Jersey still get excited about this game.

The JFA has had international aspirations since 2010, when former president Ricky Weir attracted a visit from a FIFA commission looking at new members. The JFA was later sent 500 junior footballs but never heard from FIFA again.

Most people on the island recognise that change is needed as the local league has been regularly losing teams and one of the strongest, Jersey Scottish, folded last summer, leaving 16 senior clubs. "Scottish still have an over-35s team, but I can't see them coming back," says Weir.

This season, the closest challengers to perennial champions St Pauls are St Peters, who have entered an off-island competition: the Kent Challenge Shield. Like all Channel Island sports clubs, they had to pay their opponents' trips to Jersey or play all their games away, and so opted for the latter.

There was a time when First Tower played in the FA Vase in England – for two decades from 1978 – with help from Jersey resident Jack Walker, who bankrolled Blackburn Rovers' 1995 Premier League title win. However, the steel magnate passed away in 2000 and First Tower now languish in Jersey's second tier.

Aside from the annual representative fixture with Guernsey, the football tournament at the biennial Island Games has been Jersey's main focus. The title was won in 1993, 1997 and 2009, but football will not feature at the next Games, in Gibraltar in 2019.

The only other competition is the Inter-League Cup, which sends the winners into UEFA's Regions Cup for amateurs. Jersey managed this in 2012, but in December they meekly slipped out of the tournament after a 3-1 home loss to Kent.

With UEFA rejection almost certain, the future for the game on Jersey looks bleak. WS

> "You know who you're playing week in week out. That goes right up to senior level. There's not a lot to look forward to"
>
> Cav Miley on the local game in Jersey

➤ claim the Invierno championship.
HAITI: AS Capoise beat Racing 4-1 on aggregate in the play-off Final of the closing tournament to win their first league title for 20 years.
ITALY: Marek Hamsik breaks Diego Maradona's club record with his 116th goal in all competitions for Napoli as they beat Sampdoria 3-2.
SPAIN: Barcelona beat Real Madrid 3-0 and win at the Bernabeu for a club-record third consecutive time.

Sunday December 24

PORTUGAL: Boavista striker Edu Ferreira passes away, aged just 20, after losing his battle with cancer.
SPAIN: Valencia coach Marcelino is taken to hospital before being given the all-clear after the car he is driving collides with a wild boar.

Monday December 25

RUSSIA: Vitaly Mutko steps down temporarily as the president of the Russian Football Union while he appeals his lifetime Olympic ban.

Tuesday December 26

ENGLAND: Harry Kane scores a hat-trick as Tottenham Hotspur thrash Southampton 5-2 and sets a new Premier League record of 39 goals in a calendar year. He finishes 2017 with a total of 56 goals for club and country – the best record in Europe's top five leagues.
INDIA: At 16 years and six months, Indian Arrows defender Jitendra Singh becomes the youngest scorer in I-League history in a 3-0 victory over Shillong Lajong.

Wednesday December 27

ENGLAND: Liverpool agree to pay Southampton a transfer fee of £75m for Virgil Van Dijk – a world record for a defender.
ITALY: Patrick Cutrone scores the only goal of the game in extra-time as Milan knock rivals Internazionale out of the Italian Cup.

Thursday December 28

ENGLAND: Five days after being sacked by Championship club Sheffield Wednesday, Carlos Carvalhal is named manager of Premier League side Swansea City.
HOLLAND: Ajax appoint Utrecht's Erik Ten Hag as their new coach.
ISRAEL: Ex-England boss Steve McClaren quits his role as coaching consultant at Maccabi Tel Aviv.

Friday December 29

LIBERIA: Former Milan striker George Weah is confirmed as the country's new president.
SPAIN: Sevilla hire Vincenzo ➤

➤ Montella a month after he was fired as coach of Milan.

Saturday December 30

HONDURAS: Angel Tejeda's goal in extra time gives Real Espana a 3-2 aggregate victory over Motagua in the Honduran Apertura Final.
ITALY: Benevento win their first league game of the season at the 19th attempt and end the worst-ever start to a Serie A campaign by beating Chievo 1-0 at home.

Sunday December 31

ENGLAND: Manchester City draw 0-0 at Crystal Palace and remain unbeaten in the Premier League season, but their English top-flight record of 18 wins on the trot comes to an end. Arsene Wenger takes charge of a record-breaking 811th Premier League game as Arsenal draw 1-1 at West Bromwich Albion.

Monday January 1

CROATIA: Luka Modric is named Croatian Footballer of the Year for a sixth time, equalling the record of Davor Suker.
JAPAN: Cerezo Osaka beat Yokohama F.Marinos 2-1 in the Emperor's Cup Final to seal a place in the AFC Champions League.

Tuesday January 2

ITALY: Atalanta win 2-1 away at Napoli to reach the last four of the Italian Cup.

Wednesday January 3

AUSTRALIA: Bobo's late equaliser helps Sydney set a new A-League record of 24 home games without defeat as they retain their eight-point lead over second-place Newcastle Jets with a 2-2 draw.
PORTUGAL: Porto take a two-point lead at the top of the table with a 2-1 win at Feirense as second-place Sporting are held to a 1-1 draw at Benfica, who equalise with a 90th-minute penalty.
SPAIN: Diego Costa comes off the bench and scores after just five minutes on his return to Atletico Madrid in a 4-0 Spanish Cup win at third-tier side Lleida Esportiu.

Thursday January 4

AFRICA: Liverpool and Egypt winger Mohamed Salah is named CAF Player of the Year, while Egypt boss Hector Cuper is Coach of the Year and his side the National Team of the Year.
BOSNIA: Former Croatia midfielder Robert Prosinecki is appointed Bosnia's national coach.
ITALY: Torino sack coach Sinisa ➤

Gulf Cup

JOHN DUERDEN

Oman rise above the politics

UAE beaten on penalties

The 2017 Gulf Cup was perhaps more memorable for events off the pitch than anything that happened on it, although fans in Oman will not care as they celebrated a second triumph in the region's biennial tournament after beating United Arab Emirates in a penalty shoot-out.

The eight-nation tournament almost didn't go ahead after Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and UAE broke off diplomatic relations with Qatar in June, accusing the 2022 World Cup host, of among other things, supporting terrorism. With Qatar staging the 2017 Gulf Cup, and those three countries not responding to the registration deadline of November 30, the competition looked like it was going to be the latest casualty of politics interfering in sport until Kuwait stepped in as a replacement host.

Suddenly, it was all systems go – even if things did not always go smoothly, with the Saudi Arabian delegation walking out of their first press conference in protest at the presence of Qatari broadcasters.

There was plenty of defensiveness on the pitch too. The Final between Oman and UAE finished goalless after extra time, and between them the pair conceded just one goal all tournament – and that came in their meeting in the opening match, which

Chance... Saudi's Abdurahman Al Obaid (right) takes on Fahad Al Enezi of Kuwait

Solid...Oman's Ahmed Mubarak (left) clears his lines in the Final

UAE won 1-0. After that victory, UAE drew their next four games 0-0.

Italian tactician Alberto Zaccheroni in the UAE dugout and Pim Verbeek of Holland, who was in charge of Oman, are both known for liking tight defences, so it was also no surprise that the hero of the Final was a goalkeeper.

Oman's Faiz Al Rushaidi demonstrated that there is life after former Wigan Athletic keeper Ali Al Habsi with a match-winning display and a last-minute penalty save to deny Omar Abdulrahman. Linked with several big European clubs over the years, 26-year-old Abdulrahman has plenty of talent but there are increasing doubts as to his ability to produce when the pressure is on. Not only was his last-minute spot-kick saved, he was also the only player to miss in the shoot-out as Oman won 5-4.

For the UAE, the defence may be looking solid, but one goal in over eight hours of football is a concern. "We have learned many lessons for the 2019 Asian Cup," said UAE FA president Marwan Bin Ghalita. "Zaccheroni, an expert and thinker, managed to communicate his tactical ideas to the players. His current goal is to develop the players' minds and way of thinking."

But Bin Ghalita added: "Some of the experienced players did not give everything they had during the tournament. This is because names alone are not helpful in the big matches."

Saudi Arabia were the only team in the tournament who are going to the World Cup – Iran do not participate and do not approve of the competition being known as the Arabian Gulf Cup, insisting that the body of water is the Persian Gulf – and they sent a young team to Kuwait it what was a rare example of longer-term thinking in an impatient region.

Fans should be hoping that their political leaders could do something similar. WS

➤ Mihajlovic, who was sent off for protesting about a VAR decision in a 2-0 Italian Cup loss to Juventus the night before, and name Walter Mazzarri as his replacement.

Friday January 5

ARGENTINA: After 12 months in China with Shanghai Shenhua, Carlos Tevez joins Boca Juniors for a third time.
ENGLAND: On a busy day for Everton, they sign Cenk Tosun from Besiktas, sell Ross Barkley to Chelsea and lose 2-1 to neighbours Liverpool in the FA Cup.
KUWAIT: More than 30 fans are injured when a barricade collapses at the Jaber International Stadium in Kuwait City after Oman's victory over the UAE on penalties in the Arabian Gulf Cup Final.
MEXICO: Defending Apertura champions Tigres lose 2-1 at Puebla on the opening day of the new Liga MX campaign.

Saturday January 6

ENGLAND: Stoke City dismiss manager Mark Hughes.
ITALY: Napoli beat Verona 2-0 and go into the winter break a point ahead of champions Juventus.
SPAIN: Diego Costa scores and is then sent off on his first start since returning to Atletico Madrid as they beat Getafe 2-0. Sevilla lose 5-3 to rivals Real Betis – their first home defeat since November 2016.

Sunday January 7

ANGOLA: Ntaku Zibakaka, a 23-year-old defender from DR Congo, dies after being taken ill during pre-season training with 2005 league winners Sagrada Esperanca.
ENGLAND: Arsene Wenger suffers a first-ever FA Cup third-round exit as Championship side Nottingham Forest beat holders Arsenal 4-2.
GERMANY: Deniz Naki, a German-Kurd midfielder who plays for Amed SK in the Turkish third tier, survives a suspected murder attempt in Germany when at least two bullets fired from a passing car hit the vehicle he is driving.
SPAIN: Gareth Bale scores twice in his first start in La Liga since September 20 as Real Madrid are held to a 2-2 draw at Celta Vigo.

Monday January 8

CHILE: Former Colombia, Honduras and Ecuador boss Reinaldo Rueda is named national coach of Chile.
EGYPT: Ehab Galal's first game as coach of Zamalek ends in a 3-0 loss to arch-rivals Al Ahly.
SPAIN: Barcelona complete the ➤

➤ signing Philippe Coutinho from Liverpool for €160m.

Tuesday January 9

ENGLAND: The FA announces it will interview at least one applicant from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background for future roles in the England set-up with its own version of American football's "Rooney Rule".
MALTA: Emanuel Briffa and Kyle Cesare are banned for life, with four of their team-mates suspended for between one and two years, for match-fixing offences relating to Malta's European Under-21 qualifiers against Montenegro and the Czech Republic in March 2016.

Wednesday January 10

PERU: Former Tottenham Hotspur and Chelsea manager Andre Villas-Boas withdraws from his first Dakar Rally after damaging his back during the fourth stage of the race when his car hit a sand dune.
SPAIN: Leganes reach the Spanish Cup quarter-finals for the first time, beating Villarreal on away goals after a 2-2 draw on aggregate.

Thursday January 11

FRANCE: Ligue 1 suspends the use of goalline technology until further notice after mistakes in two League Cup quarter-finals this week.
JAPAN: Yokohama striker Kazuyoshi Miura, who turns 51 next month, signs a new contract with the second-tier side.

Friday January 12

SAUDI ARABIA: Al Ahli beat Al Batin 5-0 in the country's first game at which unaccompanied adult women are allowed to attend.
SPAIN: Malaga sack coach Michel after a fourth straight defeat as they lose 1-0 at Getafe.

Saturday January 13

GERMANY: RB Leipzig beat Schalke 3-1 and leapfrog their opponents into second place, behind Bayern Munich who won 3-1 at Bayer Leverkusen on Friday.
FIFA: Former Nicaragua Football Federation president Julio Rocha, who was banned for life and was awaiting sentencing for his part in the FIFA corruption scandal, dies from cancer.
MOROCCO: Hosts Morocco kick off the African Nations Championship with a 4-0 victory over Mauritania.
PANAMA: Chorrillo open their title defence with a 1-0 win over Plaza Amador in the Clausura.
SPAIN: Pablo Fornals scores a ➤

Holland

KLAAS-JAN DROPPERT

All change as Ajax struggle

Another crisis in Amsterdam

Seven months after playing in the Europa League Final, Ajax are in crisis once again and heading for a disastrous trophyless season. Drastic measures by the board have ensured that the so-called "Velvet Revolution", orchestrated by the late Johan Cruyff, has unravelled, with more victims than winners.

May 24, 2017 was a glorious day for the Amsterdam club. Despite losing 2-0 to Manchester United in Sweden, reaching a continental Final suggested that better times would appear to be just around the corner. Now it looks as though the club's position is critical once again.

Failing to qualify for the Champions League and Europa League, an early exit from the Dutch Cup, and an insurmountable-looking gap to Eredivisie leaders PSV is simply too much for a club that has won six European trophies, three UEFA Super Cups, two Intercontinental Cups and 33 domestic titles.

Inevitably, a disappointing season resulted in the sacking of coach Marcel Keizer, who had been a controversial appointment in the first place. The former Ajax player's only top-flight managerial experience was failing to help Cambuur avoid relegation and his appointment did not retain everybody's full confidence.

Keizer showed weaknesses by changing the team constantly and failing to make clear decisions – as seen in his inability to pick a first-choice front runner, with Klaas-Jan Huntelaar and Kasper Dolberg swapping places all the time. He even tried to play both together in a 4-4-2 set-up which is highly unfamiliar at a club that has canonised the 4-3-3 system.

Battle...Ajax's Mitchell Dijks in the thick of it against Willem II

Keizer wasn't helped by the horrific collapse and unchanging critical condition of Abdelhak Nouri due to heart arrhythmias at a summer training camp in Austria, with the situation still casting an enormous shadow over the club. The player's number 34 shirt still hangs in the dressing room, and with suggestions that the Dutch FA and Ajax knew about Nouri's cardiac problems, a legal battle is expected to start soon.

Although Ajax deservedly beat PSV 3-0 in December it was too little, too late for the coach. By then the board had already written his letter of resignation.

Along with Keizer went assistants Hennie Spijkerman and Dennis Bergkamp, with the former Arsenal player considered the architect of many of the things that went wrong. His difference of opinion with

Pressure... new coach Erik Ten Hag

previous coach Peter Bosz was the main reason that the latter walked out to join Borussia Dortmund. Bergkamp then convinced general director Edwin Van der Sar to promote his friend Keizer from the reserve team, despite reservations of the board and football director Marc Overmars, who preferred a much more experienced coach.

Bergkamp had an awkward status within Ajax. As well as being assistant coach, he was also part of the so-called "technical heart" that guards the club's culture and decides on such football matters as the way of playing and the coaches. Keizer's failure meant that Bergkamp's time was also up – especially when Van der Sar, due to pressure from the board of directors, was forced to line-up against him.

Bergkamp's departure means the "Velvet Revolution" has virtually come to an end

Bergkamp's departure means that the Velvet Revolution has virtually come to an end. In 2011, Cruyff totally changed the club's structure, pleading for former players in all positions on and off the pitch. With Bayern Munich as the model, when it came to football matters Ajax should have preferred youth players to signings. However, six years later, nearly all the former players have now gone, mostly due to internal fights. Only Overmars and Van der Sar are left but they appear to have discarded Cruyff's philosophy with the recent signing of left-back Nicolas Tagliafico, a 25-year-old from Indepediente.

The same can be said about new coach Erik Ten Hag, who has arrived from Utrecht. The 47-year-old didn't emerge from the club's structure but has more similarities with Bosz. Both are praised for their tactical and analytical qualities, and scrupulously preparing a team for a game. A former Twente and Utrecht player who coached the Bayern Munich reserves when Guardiola was at the helm, Ten Hag is nicknamed "Pep" and was elected Eredivisie Coach of the Year in 2016 after some success leading Utrecht to European football last season.

He will, however, find that the demands and pressure are much higher at a club that considers itself Holland's best.

And with only a short winter training break to implement his ideas, the heat is already on. WS

➤ late goal for Villarreal as they win 1-0 and beat Real Madrid at the Bernabeu for the first time.

Sunday January 14

ENGLAND: Manchester City lose in the league for the first time this season, beaten 4-3 at Liverpool.
SPAIN: Lionel Messi breaks Gerd Muller's record of 365 goals for one club in Europe's top five leagues as Barcelona come back from 2-0 down to beat Real Sociedad 4-2. Malaga replace Michel with ex-Granada boss Jose Gonzalez.
SWAZILAND: The chairman of the Premier League of Swaziland, Victor Gamedze, is shot dead in a targeted assassination at a petrol station.

Monday January 15

ENGLAND: Paul Lambert is named Stoke City manager and watches from the stands as his new side lose 3-0 at Manchester United.
FRANCE: Referee Tony Chapron, who aimed a kick at Nantes' Diego Carlos after what looked like an accidental trip before then sending him off in Sunday's game against Paris Saint-Germain, is suspended "until further notice".
PORTUGAL: Estoril are leading 1-0 at home to Porto when the game is abandoned at half-time amid fears that a stand could collapse. The second half of the match will be played at a later date.
WALES: Ryan Giggs is appointed manager of the national side on a four-year contract.

Tuesday January 16

BRAZIL: A World Cup winner in 2002, Ronaldinho – who has not played a competitive game since 2015 – announces his retirement.
ENGLAND: Kelechi Iheanacho becomes the first player to score a goal awarded by VAR in English football as Leicester City beat Fleetwood 2-0 in an FA Cup replay.
FRANCE: Marseille beat Strasbourg 2-0 to go second in Ligue 1, ahead of Monaco who draw 2-2 with Nice in the Cote d'Azur derby.
USA: USL is officially granted second-tier status, behind MLS, for the upcoming 2018 season.

Wednesday January 17

ENGLAND: Liverpool defender Jon Flanagan is sentenced to 40 hours of unpaid work and a community order for assaulting his girlfriend in Liverpool city centre in December.
SPAIN: Lionel Messi misses a penalty as Barcelona lose 1-0 to Espanyol in the first leg of the Spanish Cup quarter-final. WS

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

DECEMBER 2017

HOW IT WORKS Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions. For details of how each ESM member voted, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11

SEASON RANKINGS Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

Marc-Andre TER STEGEN (Barcelona)	21
David DE GEA (Manchester United)	12
EDERSON (Manchester City)	6
Jan OBLAK (Atletico Madrid)	5
Thibaut COURTOIS (Chelsea)	2
Samir HANDANOVIC (Internazionale)	2
Alphonse AREOLA (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
NETO (Valencia)	1
Sven ULREICH (Bayern Munich)	1

DEFENDERS

Nicolas OTAMENDI (Manchester City)	19
Kyle WALKER (Manchester City)	13
Gerard PIQUE (Barcelona)	12
Joshua KIMMICH (Bayern Munich)	11
Jordi ALBA (Barcelona)	10
Kalidou KOULIBALY (Napoli)	9
Dani ALVES (Paris Saint-Germain)	8
Milan SKRINIAR (Internazionale)	8
John STONES (Manchester City)	7
Faouzi GHOULAM (Napoli)	6
Samuel UMTITI (Barcelona)	6
Marcos ALONSO (Chelsea)	5
Thomas MEUNIER (Paris Saint-Germain)	5
Aleksandar KOLAROV (Roma)	4
Layvin KURZAWA (Paris Saint-Germain)	4
Nelson SEMEDO (Barcelona)	4
Mehdi BENATIA (Juventus)	3
Diego GODIN (Atletico Madrid)	3
Mats HUMMELS (Bayern Munich)	3
Sergio RAMOS (Real Madrid)	3
Antonio VALENCIA (Manchester United)	3
David ALABA (Bayern Munich)	2
Cesar AZPILICUETA (Chelsea)	2
Marc BARTRA (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Andreas CHRISTENSEN (Chelsea)	2
Jose GAYA (Valencia)	2
Andreas GRANQVIST (Krasnodar)	2
MARCELO (Lyon)	2
MARCELO (Real Madrid)	2
Philipp MAX (Augsburg)	2
NALDO (Schalke)	2
Sokratis PAPASTATHOPOULOS (Borussia Dortmund)	2
Sergi ROBERTO (Barcelona)	2
Manuel AKANJI (Basle)	1
Raul ALBIOL (Napoli)	1
ALEX SANDRO (Juventus)	1
Antonin BARAK (Udinese)	1
Jerome BOATENG (Bayern Munich)	1
Ben DAVIES (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Stefan DE VRIJ (Lazio)	1
Phil JONES (Manchester United)	1
Sead KOLASINAC (Arsenal)	1
MARQUINHOS (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Jeremy MATHIEU (Sporting)	1
Lukasz PISZCZEK (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Antonio RUDIGER (Chelsea)	1
Salif SANE (Hanover)	1
Thiago SILVA (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Jonathan TAH (Bayer Leverkusen)	1
Alex TELLES (Porto)	1
Raphael VARANE (Real Madrid)	1
Thomas VERMAELEN (Barcelona)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Kevin DE BRUYNE (Manchester City)	39
David SILVA (Manchester City)	7
Sergio BUSQUETS (Barcelona)	6
Christian ERIKSEN (Tottenham Hotspur)	6
Leroy SANE (Manchester City)	6
Goncalo GUEDES (Valencia)	5
Philippe COUTINHO (Liverpool)	4
Marek HAMSIK (Napoli)	4
ISCO (Real Madrid)	4
Leon BAILEY (Bayer Leverkusen)	3
JORGINHO (Napoli)	3
N'Golo KANTE (Chelsea)	3
Nemanja MATIC (Manchester United)	3
Mesut OZIL (Arsenal)	3
Adrien RABIOT (Paris Saint-Germain)	3
Nuri SAHIN (Borussia Dortmund)	3
Eden HAZARD (Chelsea)	2
Andres INIESTA (Barcelona)	2
Geoffrey KONDOGBIA (Valencia)	2
Luka MODRIC (Real Madrid)	2
Dani PAREJO (Valencia)	2
PAULINHO (Barcelona)	2
Corentin TOLISSO (Bayern Munich)	2
Emre CAN (Liverpool)	1
CASEMIRO (Real Madrid)	1
DANILO (Porto)	1
Marouane FELLAINI (Manchester United)	1
FERNANDINHO (Manchester City)	1
Alejandro GOMEZ (Atalanta)	1
Ibai GOMEZ (Alaves)	1
Naby KEITA (RB Leipzig)	1
Saml KHEDIRA (Juventus)	1
Yunus MALLI (Wolfsburg)	1
Blaise MATUIDI (Juventus)	1
Andreas PEREIRA (Valencia)	1
Ivan PERISIC (Internazionale)	1
Maximilian PHILIPP (Borussia Dortmund)	1
PORTU (Girona)	1
Christian PULISIC (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Ivan RAKITIC (Barcelona)	1
TALISCA (Besiktas)	1
Florian THAUVIN (Marseille)	1
Marco VERRATTI (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Ruud VORMER (Club Brugge)	1
Arturo VIDAL (Bayern Munich)	1

FORWARDS

Lionel MESSI (Barcelona)	34
Harry KANE (Tottenham Hotspur)	22
Mohamed SALAH (Liverpool)	18
Edinson CAVANI (Paris Saint-Germain)	16
NEYMAR (Paris Saint-Germain)	14
Paulo DYBALA (Juventus)	9
Ciro IMMOBILE (Lazio)	9
Mauro ICARDI (Internazionale)	8
Romelu LUKAKU (Manchester United)	8
Raheem STERLING (Manchester City)	6
Dries MERTENS (Napoli)	4
Timo WERNER (RB Leipzig)	4
Sergio AGUERO (Manchester City)	3
Lorenzo INSIGNE (Napoli)	3
Radamel FALCAO (Monaco)	2
Nabil FEKIR (Lyon)	2
Kylian MBAPPE (Paris Saint-Germain)	2
Pierre-Emerick AUBAMEYANG (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Cedric BAKUMBU (Villarreal)	1
Memphis DEPAY (Lyon)	1
Gabriel JESUS (Manchester City)	1
Roberto FIRMINO (Liverpool)	1
Robert LEWANDOWSKI (Bayern Munich)	1
Sadio MANE (Liverpool)	1

On target...Nabil Fekir

Top...Ciro Immobile

Hot...Robert Lewandowski

Pos	Name	Goals	Factor	Points
1	Ciro Immobile *(Lazio)*	20	2	40
2	Edinson Cavani *(Paris Saint-Germain*	19	2	38
3	Mauro Icardi *(Internazionale)*	18	2	36
	Harry Kane *(Tottenham Hotspur)*	18	2	36
5	Mohamed Salah *(Liverpool)*	17	2	34
6	Lionel Messi *(Barcelona)*	16	2	32

Silent assassin ...Burak Yilmaz

Pos	Name	Goals	Factor	Pts
7	**RADAMEL FALCAO** *(Monaco)*	15	2	30
	JONAS *(Benfica)*	20	1.5	30
	ROBERT LEWANDOWSKI *(B Munich)*	15	2	30
10	**IGOR ANGULO** *(Gornik Zabrze)*	19	1.5	28.5
11	**PAULO DYBALA** *(Juventus)*	14	2	28
	RAHEEM STERLING *(Manchester City)*	14	2	28
13	**MIKHAIL GORDEICHUK** *(BATE)*	18	1.5	27
	ALBERT PROSA *(FCI Tallinn/Valetta)*	27	1	27
	RAUNO SAPPINEN *(Flora Tallinn)*	27	1	27
16	**SERGIO AGUERO** *(Manchester City)*	13	2	26
	P-E AUBAMEYANG *(Borussia Dortmund)*	13	2	26
	MARIANO DIAZ *(Lyon)*	13	2	26
	NABIL FEKIR *(Lyon)*	13	2	26
20	**EMILIANO MARCONDES** *(Nordsjaelland)*	17	1.5	25.5
21	**IRAKLI SIKHARULIDZE** *(Locomotive Tblisi)*	25	1	25
22	**BAS DOST** *(Sporting Lisbon)*	16	1.5	24
	GERARD GOHOU *(Kairat)*	24	1	24
	FABIO QUAGLIARELLA *(Sampdoria)*	12	2	24
	JAKUB SWIERCZOK *(Zaglebie Lubin)*	16	1.5	24
26	**CARLITOS** *(Wisla Krakow)*	15	1.5	22.5
	PAWEL SAVITSKIY *(Neman Grodno)*	15	1.5	22.5
28	**IAGO ASPAS** *(Celta Vigo)*	11	2	22
	ALFRED FINNBOGASON *(Augsburg)*	11	2	22
	NEYMAR *(Paris Saint-Germain)*	11	2	22

In form...Mauro Icardi

Pos	Name	Goals	Factor	Pts
	LUIS SUAREZ *(Barcelona)*	11	2	22
32	**VINCENT ABOUBAKAR** *(Porto)*	14	1.5	21
	BURAK YILMAZ *(Trabzonspor)*	14	1.5	21
	MAGNUS ERIKSSON *(Djurgarden)*	14	1.5	21
	BAFETIMBI GOMIS *(Galatasaray)*	14	1.5	21
	KARL HOLMBERG *(Norrkoping)*	14	1.5	21
	ADIS JAHOVIC *(Goztepe)*	14	1.5	21
	MOUSSA MAREGA *(Porto)*	14	1.5	21
	PAIXAO *(Lechia Gdansk)*	14	1.5	21
	DIA SEBA *(Maccabi Netanya)*	14	1.5	21
41	**MARIO BALOTELLI** *(Nice)*	10	2	20
	RIMO HUNT *(Levadia)*	20	1	20
	ROMELU LUKAKU *(Manchester United)*	10	2	20
	SEAN MAGUIRE *(Cork City)*	20	1	20
	DRIES MERTENS *(Napoli)*	10	2	20
	ALVARO MORATA *(Chelsea)*	10	2	20
	WAYNE ROONEY *(Everton)*	10	2	20
	SIMONE ZAZA *(Valencia)*	10	2	20
49	**FACUNDO FERREYRA** *(Shakhtar Donetsk)*	13	1.5	19.5
	PAL ALEXANDER KIRKEVOLD *(Hobro)*	13	1.5	19.5
51	**NICKLAS BENDTNER** *(Rosenborg)*	19	1	19
	ANDRI RUNAR BJARNASON *(Grindavik)*	19	1	19
	JUNIOR KABANANGA *(Astana)*	19	1	19

Rankings as of 08.01.18

Club football

AFRICA

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round draw

AC Leopards (Con) v Togo Port (Tog)
Al Tahadi (Lby) v Aduana Stars (Gha)
AS Otoho (Con) v MC Alger (Alg)
AS Vita (DRC) v Be Forward Wanderers (Mwi)
Bantu (Les) v Mbabane Swallows (Swa)
Bidvest Wits (SAf) v Pamplemousses (Mrs)
Buffles (Ben) v ASEC Abidjan (IvC)
CNaPS Sport (Mad) v KCCA (Uga)
Concorde (Mra) v Esperance Tunis (Tun)
Difaa El Jadida (Mor) v SB Benfica (GuB)
ES Setif (Alg) v Olympique Real (CAR)
FAN (Nig) v Horoya (Gui)
Generation Foot (Sen) v Misr El Makasa (Egy)
Gor Mahia (Ken) v Leones Vegetarianos (EqG)
JKU (Zan) v Zesco United (Zam)
LISCR (Lbr) v Al Hilal Omdurman (Sud)
Ngaya (Com) v Uniao Songo (Moz)
Plateau United (Nga) v Eding Sport (Cam)
Primeiro Agosto (Ang) v FC Platinum (Zim)
Rail Club du Kadiogo (BuF) v Mounana (Gab)
Rayon Sports (Rwa) v LLB Academic (Bdi)
Real Bamako (Mli) v MFM (Nga)
Saint George (Eth) v El-Salam Wau (SSu)
Stade Malien (Mli) v WAC (IvC)
Township Rollers (Bot) v Al Merreikh Omdurman (Sud)
Young Africans (Tan) v St Louis Suns (Sey)
Zanaco (Zam) v Armed Forces (Gam)
1st legs - Feb 9-11; 2nd legs - Feb 20-21

Byes to next round: *Al Ahly (Egy), Etoile Sahel (Tun), Mamelodi Sundowns (SAf), TP Mazembe (DRC), Wydad Casablanca (Mor, holders)*

CONFEDERATION CUP

Preliminary round draw

Africa Sports (IvC) v Nouadhibou (Mra)
Akwa United (Nga) v Banjul Hawks (Gam)
Al Ittihad (Lby) v Sahel (Nig)
Al Masry (Egy) v Green Buffaloes (Zam)
APR (Rwa) v Anse Reunion (Sey)
Asante Kotoko (Gha) v CARA (Con)
Ben Guerdane (Tun) v Al Hilal Juba (SSu)
Costa do Sol (Moz) v Jwaneng Galaxy (Bot)
Djoliba (Mli) v CR Belouizdad (Alg)
Energie (Ben) v Hafia (Gui)
Leopards (Ken) v Fosa Juniors (Mad)
Mangasport (Gab) v Maniema Union (DRC)
New Star (Cam) v Deportivo Niefang (EqG)
Ngazi Sport (Com) v AS Port-Louis 2000 (Mrs)
Olympic Star (Bdi) v Etoile Filante (BuF)
Onze Createurs (Mli) v ELWA United (Lbr)
Petro Atletico (Ang) v Masters Security (Mwi)
RS Berkane (Mor) v Mbour Petite Cote (Sen)
Simba (Tan) v Gendarmerie Nationale (Dji)
Tanda (IvC) v La Mancha (Con)
Young Buffaloes (Swa) v Cape Town City (SAf)
Zimamoto (Zan) v Welayta Dicha (Eth)
1st legs - Feb 9-11; 2nd legs - Feb 20-21

Byes to next round: *Al Ahli Shendi (Sud), Al Hilal Obayed (Sud), Club Africain (Tun), DC Motema Pembe (DRC), Enyimba (Nga), Nkana (Zam), Raja Casablanca (Mor), SuperSport United (SAf), USM Alger (Alg), Zamalek (Egy)*

BENIN

2017 – CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP[1] – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Buffles (C)	6	5	1	0	10	3	16
Energie	6	4	0	2	7	4	12
JA Cotonou	6	3	0	3	6	6	9
ASPAC	6	1	2	3	5	5	5
ASOS	6	1	2	3	2	6	5
ESAE	6	1	1	4	4	10	4

[1]The top 3 from both regular-season groups took part. Each team played only the 3 teams from the other regular-season group (twice)

COMOROS

2017 – NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ngaya (C)	4	3	0	1	8	5	9
Belle Lumiere	4	1	1	2	5	6	4
Etoile d'Or	4	1	1	2	3	5	4

MALAWI

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Be Forward (C)	30	21	6	3	46	16	69
Big Bullets	30	20	7	3	41	10	67
Silver Strikers	30	16	13	1	39	16	61
Civil Sporting	30	13	9	8	47	29	48
Blue Eagles	30	12	9	9	34	30	45
MAFCO	30	12	8	10	31	31	44
Moyale B'ks	30	12	8	10	37	41	44
Kamuzu B'ks	30	12	6	12	40	40	42
Red Lions	30	11	7	12	34	28	40
Mzuni	30	10	7	13	32	34	37
Azam Tigers	30	6	14	10	30	31	32
M Security	30	7	10	13	38	50	31
Dwangwa Utd	30	9	4	17	31	46	31
Wizards (R)	30	7	6	17	26	40	27
Blantyre U (R)	30	6	6	18	32	57	24
Chitipa U (R)	30	4	4	22	21	60	16

REUNION

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts[1]
St-Pierroise (C)	26	24	2	0	68	7	100
Excelsior	26	15	7	4	51	23	78
Ste-Marienne	26	13	10	3	41	22	75
St-Denis	26	11	5	10	38	35	64
Jeanne d'Arc	26	10	5	11	31	26	61
OCSA Leopards	26	8	8	10	32	35	58
Marsouins	26	8	7	11	26	50	57
St-Louisienne	26	8	6	12	27	34	56
Ste-Suzanne	26	8	6	12	23	32	56
Petite-Ile	26	9	3	14	32	39	56
St-Pauloise	26	9	2	15	33	44	55
SDEFA (R)[2]	26	6	8	12	22	42	52
Trois Bassins (R)	26	8	2	16	27	48	52
Grands Bois (R)	26	7	5	14	24	38	52

[1]4pts for a win, 2pts for a draw, 1pt for a defeat
[2]Relegated after losing rel/prom play-off

SEYCHELLES

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
St Louis Suns (C)	22	17	3	2	48	14	54
Cote d'Or	22	15	4	3	62	23	49
La Passe	22	13	3	6	56	39	42
St Michel Utd	22	10	5	7	45	36	35
Nthn Dynamo	22	10	2	10	38	33	32
Lightstars	22	8	6	8	37	31	30
The Lions	22	8	6	8	28	35	30
Anse Reunion	22	8	3	11	18	34	27
Red Star DF	22	6	4	12	30	47	22
Foresters	22	4	9	9	25	36	21
Revengers	22	6	2	14	27	51	20
St J Bosco (R)	22	1	5	16	22	57	8

SUDAN

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Hilal Om (C)	34	23	11	0	67	22	80
Al Merreikh O	34	24	7	3	66	21	79
Al Hilal Ob	34	16	11	7	56	34	59
Al Ahli Sh'di	34	16	9	9	47	34	57
Khartoum	34	15	11	8	59	31	56
Al Hilal Kad'li	34	13	12	9	41	33	51
Al Ahli K'toum	34	15	6	13	45	43	51
Al Shorta	34	13	11	10	46	42	50
Hay Al Wadi	34	11	11	12	27	39	44
Al Ahli Atbara	34	11	8	15	31	41	41
Hay Al Arab	34	10	10	14	25	30	40
Merreikh Kosti	34	7	14	13	28	43	35
Al Amal	34	7	13	14	32	43	34
Merreikh Ny'a	34	7	13	14	29	42	34
Merreikh El F[1]	34	7	10	17	27	45	31
Al Rabta (R)	34	5	14	15	23	44	29
Tiraat Al Bija (R)	34	8	5	21	19	50	29
Al Ahli WM (R)	34	5	10	19	24	55	25

[1]Stay in top division after winning rel/prom play-off

CONCACAF

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st round draw

Cibao (DoR) v Guadalajara (Mex)
Colorado Rapids (USA) v Toronto (Can)
Herediano (CR) v Tigres (Mex)
Motagua (Hnd) v Tijuana (Mex)
Olimpia (Hnd) v New York Red Bulls (USA)
Santa Tecla (ESv) v Seattle Sounders (USA)
Saprissa (CR) v America (Mex)
Tauro (Pan) v Dallas (USA)
1st legs - Feb 20-22; 2nd legs - Feb 27-Mar1

BELIZE

2017-18 Opening Final

1st leg - Dec 3; 2nd leg - Dec 9
Verdes v Belmopan Bandits
1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2, Verdes on away goals)

COSTA RICA

2017-18 Apertura Final

1st leg - Dec 20; 2nd leg - Dec 23
Perez Zeledon v Herediano 1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)

EL SALVADOR

2017-18 Apertura Final

Dec 17: Alianza 4 Santa Tecla 1.

GRENADA

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hurricane (C)	19	15	2	2	46	16	47
Hard Rock	19	12	3	4	29	18	39
Paradise	19	12	2	5	45	21	38
St John's	19	9	4	6	35	20	31
QPR	19	8	3	8	36	34	27
Eagles Super S	19	6	7	6	32	32	25
Mount Rich	19	7	3	9	30	36	24
GBSS	19	6	5	8	27	32	23
Chantimelle (R)	20	5	4	11	22	39	19
Spartans (R)	19	4	2	13	21	43	14
TAMCC (R)	19	2	3	14	17	49	9

Final round of games cancelled

GUATEMALA

2017-18 Apertura Final

1st leg - Dec14; 2nd leg - Dec17
Municipal v Antigua 1-1, 1-2 (agg 2-3)

HAITI

2017 Cloture (closing) Final

1st leg - Dec 21; 2nd leg - Dec 24
Capoise v Racing Gonaives 1-0, 3-1 (agg 4-1)

HONDURAS

2017-18 Apertura Final

1st leg - Dec 27; 2nd leg - Dec 30
Real Espana v Motagua 2-0, 1-2 (aet) (agg 3-2)

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
NE Stars (C)	18	12	4	2	39	15	40
W Connection	18	10	3	5	33	19	33
Defence Force	18	9	4	5	27	20	31
Club Sando	18	8	6	4	28	16	30
SJ Jabloteh	18	8	2	8	27	33	26
Caledonia Utd	18	6	4	8	19	21	22
Point Fortin	18	6	3	9	26	29	21
Police	18	5	5	8	29	29	20
Central	18	4	5	9	23	37	17
St Ann's	18	2	4	12	12	44	10

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Group stage draw

Group 1
Cerro Porteno (Par), Defensor Sporting (Uru), Gremio (Bra), Monagas (Ven)

Group 2
Atletico Nacional (Col), Bolivar (Bol), Colo Colo (Chl), Delfin (Ecu)

Group 3
Atletico Tucuman (Arg), Libertad (Par), Penarol (Uru), The Strongest (Bol)

Group 4
Emelec (Ecu), Flamengo (Bra), River Plate (Arg), *3rd qualifying round winner*

Group 5
Cruzeiro (Bra), Racing Club (Arg), Universidad de Chile (Chl), *3rd qualifying round winner*

Group 6
Estudiantes (Arg), Real Garcilaso (Per), Santos (Bra), *3rd qualifying round winner*

Group 7
Corinthians (Bra), Deportivo Lara (Ven), Independiente (Arg), Millonarios (Col)

Group 8
Alianza Lima (Per), Boca Juniors (Arg), Palmeiras (Bra), *3rd qualifying round winner*

Games to be played Feb 27-May 24

● *The top 2 in each group qualify for the1st knockout round (last16); the 8 3rd-placed teams enter the Sudamericana Cup in the 2nd round*

SUDAMERICANA CUP

1st round draw

Atletico Paranaense (Bra) v Newell's (Arg)
Audax Italiano (Chl) v Botafogo (Bra)
Barcelona (Ecu) v General Diaz (Par)
Blooming (Bol) v Bahia (Bra)
Defensa y Justicia (Arg) v America (Col)
Deportivo Cali (Col) v Danubio (Uru)
El Nacional (Ecu) v San Jose (Bol)
Estudiantes Merida (Ven) v Deportes Temuco (Chl)
Everton (Chl) v Caracas (Ven)
Fluminense (Bra) v Nacional Potosi (Bol)
Jaguares (Col) v Boston River (Uru)
Lanus (Arg) v Sporting Cristal (Per)
LDU Quito (Ecu) v Guabira (Bol)
Nacional Asuncion (Par) v Mineros de Guayana (Ven)
Rosario Central (Arg) v Sao Paulo (Bra)
San Lorenzo (Arg) v Atletico Mineiro (Bra)
Sol de America (Par) v Independiente Medellin (Col)
Sport Rosario (Per) v Cerro (Uru)
Sportivo Luqueno (Par) v Deportivo Cuenca (Ecu)
Union Espanola (Chl) v Sport Huancayo (Per)
UT Cajamarca (Per) v Rampla Juniors (Uru)
Zamora (Ven) v Colon (Arg)
1st legs - Feb13-Apr12; 2nd legs - Mar 6-May10

BOLIVIA

2017 – CLAUSURA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bolivar[1] (C)	22	12	6	4	35	26	44
The Strongest	22	12	4	6	42	24	40
Wilstermann[1]	22	12	4	6	38	23	37
San Jose	22	10	3	9	31	26	33
Blooming	22	7	11	4	24	16	32
Oriente	22	7	7	8	28	30	28
Guabira	22	8	4	10	29	32	28
Petrolero (R)[2]	22	6	8	8	24	23	26
Universitario	22	7	5	10	26	34	26
Real Potosi	22	7	4	11	21	36	25
Sport Boys	22	6	5	11	24	41	23
Nacional	22	6	3	13	25	36	21

[1]Wilstermann fielded too many foreign players in the 2-2 draw with Bolivar - Bolivar gained 2 extra points and Wilstermann had 3 pts deducted
[2]Relegated after losing rel/prom play-off (entered because Petrolero had the joint lowest points total, with Universitario, in the combined table of the 3 most recent tournaments and then lost a deciding play-off against Universitario)

COLOMBIA

2017 Clausura Final

1st leg - Dec13; 2nd leg - Dec17
Millonarios v Santa Fe 1-0, 2-2 (agg 3-2)

ECUADOR

2017 – 2ND STAGE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Emelec (Q)	22	14	3	5	39	20	45
El Nacional	22	12	5	5	46	26	41
Macara	22	10	7	5	28	17	37
Delfin	22	9	10	3	30	20	37
LDU Quito	22	10	5	7	41	32	35
Independiente	22	9	7	6	41	30	34
Barcelona	22	8	8	6	26	20	32
Cuenca	22	9	5	8	27	26	32
Guayaquil City	22	4	7	11	15	31	19
Univ Catolica	22	5	2	15	23	41	17
Cl Juvenil (R)[1]	22	4	5	13	31	56	17
F Amarilla[2] (R)[1]	22	5	2	15	17	45	12

As winners, Emelec entered the 2017 Championship Final
[1]The 2 teams with the lowest points total in the combined1st/2nd stage table were relegated
[2]5pts deducted for not submitting payrolls

2017 Championship Final
(1st stage winners Delfin v 2nd stage winners Emelec)
1st leg - Dec13; 2nd leg - Dec17
Emelec v Delfin 4-2, 2-0 (agg 6-2)

VENEZUELA

2017 Clausura Final
1st leg - Dec 3; 2nd leg - Dec 9
Mineros de Guayana v Deportivo Lara 1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, Deportivo Lara 4-3 on pens)

2017 Championship Final
(apertura winners Monagas v clausura winners Deportivo Lara)
1st leg - Dec13; 2nd leg - Dec17
Monagas v Deportivo Lara 0-1, 2-0 (agg 2-1)

ASIA

CAMBODIA

2017 Championship Final
Dec 30: Boeung Ket Angkor 1 National Defense Ministry 1 (aet, Boeung Ket Angkor 10-9 on pens).

MALDIVES

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
N Radiant (C)	14	13	0	1	44	9	39
TC Sports	14	10	2	2	31	14	32
Maziya	14	8	3	3	30	10	27
Thinadhoo	14	5	3	6	23	18	18
Green Streets	14	5	1	8	15	28	16
Milandhoo	14	3	5	6	18	26	14
Maalhos	14	2	3	9	18	40	9
Kudahuvadhoo	14	0	3	11	6	40	3

PHILIPPINES

2017 Championship Final
Dec 16: Ceres 4 Global 1.

TURKMENISTAN

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Altyn Asyr (C)	32	25	4	3	83	24	79
Ahal	32	22	6	4	70	21	72
Sagadam	32	19	3	10	55	32	60
Balkan	32	14	5	13	51	47	47
Asgabat FK	32	13	6	13	32	44	45
Energetik	32	11	5	16	45	47	38
Merw	32	10	3	19	34	61	33
Kopetdag	32	9	6	17	35	55	33
Turan	32	1	2	29	12	86	5

OCEANIA

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group stage draw

Group A
Ba (Fij), Lae City Dwellers (PNG), Nalkutan (Van), *Qualifying stage winner*

Group B
Dragon (Tah), Erakor Golden Star (Van), Lossi (NC), Solomon Warriors (Sol)

Group C
Auckland City (NZ), Lautoka (Fij), Madang (PNG), Venus (Tah)

Group D
Magenta (NC), Marist (Sol), Team Wellington (NZ), *Qualifying stage runner-up*

Group games to be played in February/March

● *The top 2 in each group will qualify for the quarter-finals*

COOK ISLANDS

2017 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tupapa[1] (C)	11	9	1	1	48	13	28
Nikao Sok'tak	12	6	4	2	29	19	22
Puaikura	12	6	3	3	31	21	21
Takuvaine	12	6	2	4	21	23	20
Matavera	12	2	4	6	19	23	10
Titikaveka	12	2	2	8	25	54	8
Avatiu[1]	11	1	2	8	13	33	5

[1] *Avatiu v Tupapa game cancelled*

Internationals

GULF CUP

Played in Kuwait City, Kuwait

Group A

Dec 22
Kuwait 1 (Al Buraiki 60)
Saudi Arabia 2 (Al Moasher 13, Fallatah 52)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Al Samaheeji (Bhn)

Oman 0
United Arab Emirates 1 (Mabkhout pen 28)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Al Qaysi (Irq)

Dec 25
United Arab Emirates 0
Saudi Arabia 0
Ref: Asimov (Uzb)

Kuwait 0
Oman 1 (Mubarak pen 58)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Al Adba (Qat)

Dec 28
Saudi Arabia 0
Oman 2 (Al Ruzaiqi 58, 77)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Perera (Sri)

Kuwait 0
United Arab Emirates 0
Ref: Al Qaysi (Irq)

GULF CUP – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Oman (Q)	3	2	0	1	3	1	6
UAE (Q)	3	1	2	0	1	0	5
Saudi Arabia	3	1	1	1	2	3	4
Kuwait	3	0	1	2	1	3	1

Group B

Dec 23
Qatar 4 (Akram Afif 2, Almahdi Ali 5, Almoez Ali 18, Pedro Miguel 84)
Yemen 0
HT: 3-0. **Ref:** Al Yaqoubi (Oma)

Bahrain 1 (Rashid 79)
Iraq 1 (Abdul-Raheem 88)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Al Jeneibi (UAE)

Dec 26
Yemen 0
Bahrain 1 (Rashid pen 39)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Al Harbi (Sau)

Iraq 2 (Faez 45+1, Husni 65)
Qatar 1 (Almoez Ali 17)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Shaban (Kuw)

Dec 29
Iraq 3 (Husni 54, Faez pen 64, Kamel 80)
Yemen 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Al Jeneibi (UAE)

Qatar 1 (Al Haidos pen 45+5)
Bahrain 1 (Madan 57)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Asimov (Uzb)
Sent off: Fathi (Qatar) 90

GULF CUP – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Iraq (Q)	3	2	1	0	6	2	7
Bahrain (Q)	3	1	2	0	3	2	5
Qatar	3	1	1	1	6	3	4
Yemen	3	0	0	3	0	8	0

● *The top 2 in groups qualified for semi-finals*

Semi-finals

Jan 2
Oman 1 (Abduljabbar og 29)
Bahrain 0
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Perera (Sri)

Iraq 0
United Arab Emirates 0
Aet. United Arab Emirates 4-2 on pens
Ref: Asimov (Uzb)

Final

Jan 5
Oman 0
United Arab Emirates 0
Aet. Oman 5-4 on pens
Ref: Shaban (Kuw)

FRIENDLIES

Thursday, December 14
Dec14 - Doha
Qatar 1 (Almoez Ali 6)
Liechtenstein 2 (Salanovic 29, Polverino pen 90)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Shaban (Kuw)
Sent off: Quintans (Liechtenstein) 79

Monday, December 18
Dec18 - Riffa
Bahrain 0
Kuwait 0

Dec18 - Dubai
United Arab Emirates 1 (Malallah 39)
Iraq 0
HT: 1-0

Monday, December 25
Dec 25 - Amman
Jordan 1 (Al Tamari 52)
Libya 1 (Al Badri pen 75)
HT: 0-0

Sunday, January 7
Jan 7 - Abu Dhabi, UAE
Sweden 1 (Holmberg 79)
Estonia 1 (Henri Anier 58)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 200. **Ref:** Munukka (Fin)
Sweden: Dahlberg - Tinnerholm, Brorsson (Papagiannopoulos 64), Wahlqvist (Mrabti 73), K Olsson, G Nilsson (Holmberg 73), J Andersson, J Nilsson, Gojani, Hamad, Jordan Larsson (Sema 64).
Estonia: Meerits - Vihmann, Kruglov, Antonov (Ainsalu 46), Miller (Marin 54), Henry Anier (Lilander 82), Mosnikov (Roosnupp 54), Artjom Dmitrijev, Baranov (Reintam 46), Tamm, Mool (Elhi 46).

Thursday, January 11
Jan11 -Jakarta
Indonesia 0
Iceland 6 (A Bjarnason 31, K Finnbogason 47, Karlsson 66, Haraldsson 69, Hermannsson 80, Eyjolfsson 81)
HT: 0-1
Iceland: Schram (Einarsson 46) - V Jonsson, Hermannsson, Eyjolfsson, A Gudmundsson, B Bodvarsson (Fridriksson 71), A Bjarnason (K Finnbogason 46), O Skulason (Haraldsson 68), Anderson (Karlsson 63), Traustason (Hilmar Halldorsson 68), Fridjonsson.

Jan11 - Abu Dhabi, UAE
Jordan 1 (Al Mardi 82)
Finland 2 (Toivio 35, Pelvas 60)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** F Al Marri (Qat)
Finland: Joronen - Granlund (Taimi 43), Toivio (Pirttijoki 68), J Ojala, Pirinen (O'Shaughnessy 46), Soiri (Taylor 57), Sparv, Kamara (Schuller 57), Tuominen, Pelvas, T Vayrynen (Kallman 82).

Jan11 - Abu Dhabi, UAE
Sweden 1 (G Nilsson 90+3)
Denmark 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Munukka (Fin)
Sweden: Rinne - Johan Larsson, Papagiannopoulos, Jacob Larsson, Lindkvist (Tinnerholm 60), Sema, Karlstrom (K Olsson 66), Lewicki, Mrabti (Hamad 78), Holmberg (Jordan Larsson 66), Karlsson (G Nilsson 66).
Denmark: Ronnow - Gammelby (Nissen 59), L Nielsen, K Hansen, Pedersen (Ahlmann 70), Mike Jensen, Norgaard (J Poulsen 59), Mathias Jensen, Skov, Pohl (Uhre 55), Duelund (Kadrii 75).

Sunday, January 14
Jan14 -Jakarta
Indonesia 1 (Ilham 29)
Iceland 4 (A Gudmundsson 45+2, pen 66, 72, Smarason 59)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 36,220. **Ref:** Araki (Jap)
Iceland: Runarsson - Fridjonsson (V Jonsson 68), Eyjolfsson (O Omarsson 46), Fjoluson, Fridriksson, Traustason (A Gudmundsson 27), Smarason, O Skulason (Hilmar Halldorsson 46), A Sigurdarson, A Bjarnason (Karlsson 46), K Finnbogason (Haraldsson 76).

KEY TO TABLES (C) = champions; (R) = relegated; (Q) = enter next stage

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Spectacle...La Bombonera, home of Boca Juniors

BOCA JUNIORS v RIVER PLATE

Former neighbours contest Argentina's *Superclasico*

Although both clubs began life in the same dockland area of Buenos Aires, this is a rivalry that is as much about money and class as it is about football.

River Plate were founded in La Boca in 1901 – four years before Boca Juniors – but left the area for the more affluent Nunez district in the north of the city in 1925, earning themselves the nickname of *Los Millonarios* in the process.

Traditionally the club of the working class, Boca fans have since sneeringly referred to their supposedly more upper-class rivals as "*gallinas*" (chickens) because they think River are afraid of everything. Those of a red-and-white persuasion respond by calling Boca supporters "*puercos*" (pigs) and claim that their rivals' stadium is in such a poor part of the city that it smells like a pig sty.

It has been said that more than half of Argentina supports one of the two sides, and between them they have dominated the domestic game: River claiming a record 36 league championships, with Boca in second place on 32.

Boca, however, maintain the upper hand on the continental stage, with six Libertadores wins to River's three. WS

Pigs...River fans mock Boca

ON BOTH SIDES

GABRIEL BATISTUTA	CLAUDIO CANIGGIA	HUGO GATTI	JULIO OLARTICOECHEA	OSCAR RUGGERI
River *1989-90*	River *1985-88*	River *1964-68*	River *1981-84*	Boca *1980-84*
Boca *1990-91*	Boca *1995-98*	Boca *1976-88*	Boca *1985-86*	River *1985-88*

CLASSIC ENCOUNTERS

1908 Aug 2
Boca win the first meeting between the two sides, triumphing 3–1 in a friendly fixture.

1928 Dec 23
Boca beat River 6–0 in the biggest win in *Superclasico* history.

1968 Jun 23
Following a goalless draw at River's El Monumental stadium, a crush at gate 12 leaves 71 dead in Argentina's worst-ever football-related disaster.

2004 Jun 17
Boca win on penalties at El Monumental after their Libertadores Cup semi-final finishes 2-2 on aggregate.

2017 May 14
The second leg of a Libertadores Cup tie is abandoned at half-time when River players are attacked by Boca supporters with pepper spray. Boca are disqualified and River go on to win the tournament for the first time since 1996.

2017 Nov 5
In the most recent meeting between the pair, River Plate are beaten 2-1 at home.

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